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# The Origins of Three Meroitic Bronze Oil Lamps in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Stephanie Joan Sakoutis

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THE ORIGINS OF THREE MEROITIC BRONZE OIL LAMPS IN  
THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

by

STEPHANIE JOAN SAKOUTIS

Under the Direction of Dr. Melinda Hartwig

ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses three bronze oil lamps found in the ancient city of Meroë, in the collection of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Scholars have considered the lamps to be imported from Hellenistic Egypt, but careful examination has revealed that the lamps were not imported. The lamps were locally made in Meroë; the materials and technology needed to create bronze lamps were available to Meroitic craftsmen.

INDEX WORDS: Meroë, Nubia, Oil lamp, Bronze, Burial goods, Artists, Art, Ancient Rome, Ancient Greece, Hellenism

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THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

by

STEPHANIE JOAN SAKOUTIS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2009

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Stephanie Joan Sakoutis  
2009

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THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

by

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MFA- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

RCK- *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush*

ROM- Royal Ontario Museum

## 1-INTRODUCTION

The kingdom of Meroë, in ancient Nubia, is not nearly as well known as its neighbor to the north, Egypt. Often eclipsed by Egypt's fame, Nubia has frequently been overlooked. Despite this oversight, ancient Nubia was rich with culture and power. The kingdom of Meroë survived even after Egypt had fallen to the Macedonians and then the Romans. During the Ptolemaic and Roman periods in Egypt, the city of Meroë and Meroitic culture was dominant in Nubia.

Among the vast Nubian collection of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (MFA) are three bronze oil lamps (Figs. 1.1, 1.2, & 1.3). On first examination these lamps appear to be Hellenistic in their design and execution. The decorative motifs that are found on each of the lamps such as the griffin, acanthus leaf, and rosette were popular in the Hellenistic world. The lamps, however, were excavated in the city of Meroë and bear Meroitic emblems below their filling holes. No thorough examination has been done to determine the origins of the lamps. Some scholars claim that the lamps do not have parallels outside of the city of Meroë, while others believe the lamps were simply imported from the Hellenistic world. All of the lamps were found in Meroitic cemeteries and were excavated by George A. Reisner for the MFA during its Nubian campaigns between March 1921 and January 1922.<sup>1</sup> A fourth lamp was also excavated in the West Cemetery by John Garstang. It is now in the collection of the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum.<sup>2</sup> The city of Meroë was the last major capital city of ancient Nubia.

The beginning of the Meroitic period of Nubian history is marked by the move from the capital city and cemeteries of Napata to the city and cemeteries of Meroë, around 300 BC.

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<sup>1</sup> H.U.-MFA Object Registers Sudan IX Begarawiyeh (Meroë) 21-11-1 to 23-1-203, 20 (Beg. 22-1-200 to 22-1-629, 22-2-50 to 22-2-296).

<sup>2</sup> László Török, *Meroë City: An Ancient African Capital Part One: Text* (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1997), 274.

Meroë city would be the seat of Nubian power for nearly 500 years. The king associated with the move is Arkamani, whose burial in Meroë dates to 270-260 BC. Arkamani is called Ergamenes by Greek writers, and is considered contemporary with Ptolemy II of Egypt (285-245 BC). Two centuries later, after the Roman conquest of Egypt, outbreaks of violence between Meroitic and Roman forces caused Emperor Augustus to sign a peace treaty with Meroë. In the fold of *Pax Romana*, Meroë and Rome were able to sustain peace for the duration of Roman history.<sup>3</sup>

Meroitic artists were adept at absorbing foreign styles and blending them with local artistic elements to create a wholly unique local style. In fact, one of the only unifying features in Meroitic art is that it did not have any kind of stylistic unity.<sup>4</sup> The lack of sources dedicated to the stylistic standard of Nubian bronzes or lamps makes it necessary to use sources that focus on the stylistic aspects of similar Hellenistic pieces of the period. The main local feature on each of the lamps is a Meroitic emblem below the filling hole. The exact meaning of these emblems is unknown, but a range of hypotheses have been offered to explain them. Examining objects found in the same tombs in which the bronze lamps were found may help to determine if the emblems were a maker's mark, or if they held religious, symbolic, or royal significance.

Through the examination of these three bronze oil lamps from Meroë, light may be shed on the unusual aspects of Meroitic art. The blending of foreign and local styles can be seen in many different media throughout the Meroitic kingdom, and may suggest that the lamps were made in Meroë. However, if the lamps were imported from the heart of the Hellenistic world, how did the stylistic model of the three lamps find its way to the extreme fringes of Greco-

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<sup>3</sup> David Edwards, *The Nubian Past: An Archaeology of the Sudan* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 143-145.

<sup>4</sup> Steffen Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and the Sudan*, vol. II. (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 65-66.

Roman culture? Close study of the stylistic characteristics of these lamps will support the theory that the lamps were manufactured locally in Meroë.



Figure 1.1: Hanging Lamp. Nubian, Meroitic Period, reign of Takideamani, A.D. 140-155.  
Findspot: Nubia (Sudan), Meroë (Beg, North), Pyramid 29. Bronze. Height x width  
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Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photographer: Jürgen Liepe.  
Harvard University—Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition, (24.959)



Figure 1.2: Hanging lamp with leaf handle and griffin-head hook. Nubian, Meroitic Period, reign of Takideamani, A.D. 140–155. Object Place: Sudan, Nubia. Bronze. Overall: 65.8 x 44 cm (25 7/8 x 17 5/16 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvard University—Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition (24.966a-b)





Figure 1.3: Lamp. Nubian, Meroitic Period, 270 B.C.–A.D. 320. Findspot: Nubia (Sudan), Meroë, Tomb W 110. Bronze. Height (of acanthus) x length: 17.3 x 21 cm (6 13/16 x 8 1/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Harvard University—Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition (24.968a-b)

## 2-DESCRIPTION

The cemeteries at Meroë are called *Begarawiya*, the modern name for the area, and are classified as either the North, South, or West cemetery.<sup>5</sup> The four bronze oil lamps were all found in *Begarawiya*, in four separate burials. George Reisner and Dows Dunham excavated one of the lamps in the North Cemetery and two others in the West cemetery.<sup>6</sup> The fourth was excavated in the West Cemetery by John Garstang.<sup>7</sup> The North cemetery consisted of 44 pyramids with all but six belonging to monarchs. The kings, queens, and crown princes of the Meroitic period used the North Cemetery as their royal burial ground between the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>8</sup> The West Cemetery had both pyramids and graves belonging to lesser members of the royal families and members of important families.

The first lamp, MFA 24.959 (Fig. 1.1), comes from the North Cemetery pyramid numbered 29, Beg. N. 29.<sup>9</sup> This pyramid belonged to King Takideamani. Reisner and his assistant Dows Dunham assigned dates to the reigns of Meroitic monarchs during their excavations. This list was compiled and further adjusted by Dunham in the early 1950s.<sup>10</sup> By the beginning of the next decade, Fritz Hintz had made further modifications to the list of Meroitic rulers and the dates associated with their reigns. This list is generally accepted over

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Kendall, *Kush: The Lost Kingdom of the Nile* (Brockton: Brockton Art Museum, 1982), 44.

<sup>6</sup> Dows Dunham, ed., *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush: Royal Tombs at Meroë and Barkal*, vol. IV (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1957), 170; and Dows Dunham, ed., *The Royal Cemeteries of Kush: The West and South Cemetery at Meroë*, vol. V (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1963), 203, 225.

<sup>7</sup> Török, *Meroë City*, 274.

<sup>8</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 44.

<sup>9</sup> The tombs are denoted by abbreviating *Begarawiya* to “Beg.” and adding either “N,” “S,” or “W” to denote the north, south, or west cemetery. Example: “Beg. N.” The number assigned to each tomb was based on George A. Reisner’s initial assumption on the chronology of Meroitic rulers. Thus, Beg. N. 1 would be the oldest tomb in the North Cemetery. However, the chronology of the tombs and the rulers has been modified over the subsequent years. Personal correspondence with Dr. Peter Lacovara.

<sup>10</sup> Dows Dunham, ed., *Decorated Chapels of the Meroitic Pyramids at Meroë and Barkal* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1952), 2-8.

Dunham's list.<sup>11</sup> However, Reisner based his timeline on tomb development. There has been a debate over the chronology of Meroë since Reisner offered his dates, and the debate continues to this day. The chronology is still subject to revision.<sup>12</sup> The date of King Takideamani's burial was probably between 146 AD and 165 AD,<sup>13</sup> but has been dated as late as the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>14</sup> In Dunham's excavation notes he described the lamp simply:

Bronze hanging lamp on foot. Projecting spout, hinged cover to filling hole, handle, and acanthus-leaf flame guard. Bronze suspension hook in form of a griffon-head mounted on end of an iron rod (decayed) so placed that the lamp would hang in a horizontal position. Length and angle of decayed iron rod obtained while object lay in position. On body of lamp in front of filling hole a mark in relief in the casting, and on back of flame guard an incised Meroitic cursive inscription.<sup>15</sup>

Other sources have been more descriptive, calling the body spherical with a wide opening at the end of a long snout-like nozzle.<sup>16</sup> The lamp measures 18.7 centimeters high,<sup>17</sup> with the griffin-headed rod at 54.26 cm high x 12.7 cm wide, x 36.83 cm long. The nozzle measures 15.24 cm long. There is a slight depression at the very tip of the nozzle, but it is otherwise rounded. The hinged lid is 5.08 cm wide and decorated with a rosette design with a knob at the center (Fig. 2.1). There is a tri-leaf design with a banded border on the hinged attachment. A raised border circles the lid on the body of the lamp. Below the lid and the filling hole is a Meroitic emblem in raised relief (Fig. 2.2).<sup>18</sup> It is 4.45 cm long x 3.81 cm wide. The emblem consists of an acanthus leaf inside of a circle on either side of which is a "was" scepter. Below this emblem are two horizontal lines over an upside down "Y". Despite the emblem's small

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<sup>11</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Personal correspondence with Peter Lacovara.

<sup>13</sup> Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity*, 263.

<sup>14</sup> László Török, "A Special Group of Meroitic Property Marks from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries A.D." *Bulletin D'Informations Meroitiques* 10 (1972), 43.

<sup>15</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, IV, 170.

<sup>16</sup> Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity*, 263.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>18</sup> Wenig describes the emblem as "affixed" to the body of the lamp, *Africa in Antiquity*, 263. The Meroitic emblems are further discussed on pages 34-36.

scale, the detail is minute, including even the veins of the acanthus leaf and facial details on the animal head of the “*was*” scepter. The acanthus-leaf-shaped flame guard measures 21.50 cm long and shows a large vein going down the center of the leaf, from which a number of smaller veins branch off (Fig. 2.3). The edges of the leaf have drill holes that opened out. The flame guard has a very slight curvature (Fig. 2.4). On the back of the flame guard is a Meroitic inscription which reads: *abri-lh-li-so* (Fig. 2.5).<sup>19</sup> The handle, behind the flame guard, is in the shape of a double ring with a banded design with leaves on the top and bottom (Fig. 2.6). An iron rod (replaced in modern times) was attached at an angle so that the lamp could hang horizontally. This rod is surmounted by a griffin-headed hook (Figs. 2.7). Together, the hook and rod measure 35.56 cm long. The hair, eyes, and nostrils of the griffin are incised, and the hair detailing is also shown on the ears and on the forehead of the griffin (Figs. 2.8 & 2.9). At the bottom of the hook is a bell-shaped base encircled by a leaf pattern (Fig 2.7). A decorated base is attached to the bottom of the rod. It has a ball-like shape with vertical lines going around it (Fig 2.10). The flame guard, rod, and handle were not attached directly to the body of the lamp, but to a bronze block that was fixed to the body of the lamp. The base of the lamp is in the shape of an inverted bell and measures 12.7 cm wide x 9.53 cm tall. The West Cemetery held the three other lamps similar in style to the one found in Beg. N. 29.

In the North Cemetery, many tombs can be linked to identifiable tomb owners. This is not the case in the West Cemetery. I was unable to find names to match the tombs in which the three other bronze oil lamps were found. The first lamp (MFA 24.966) from the West Cemetery comes from Beg. W. 122 (Fig. 2.11). As in the case of MFA 24.959, the dates of this burial are

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<sup>19</sup> Török, *Meroë City*, 276. The inscription here is a transcription of the actual Meroitic characters on the lamp. The meaning of the lamp is discussed on page 64.

uncertain. Reisner dated this burial between 184 and 317 AD,<sup>20</sup> and Timothy Kendall assigned a date between the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. Neither one mentions, nor speculates, to whom the original burial belonged.<sup>21</sup> Dunham's description simply stated that it was a hanging bronze oil lamp with a griffin-headed hook connected by a corroded iron rod. He mentioned the incised Meroitic emblem, which is in the same location as the emblem on the previous lamp. However, the emblems themselves are different.<sup>22</sup> The lamp was similar to the lamp found in Beg. N. 29. It has a bulbous body and a small ring-shaped base measuring 32.39 cm long x 10.8 cm tall (Fig. 2.11).<sup>23</sup> The small ring base is 1.27 cm high x 8.89 cm wide. The lipped nozzle is 16.15 cm long and has a vegetal design that folds over the front of the lip and comes to a point underneath the neck of the nozzle (Fig 2.12 & 2.13). This lamp does not have a lid, and I am not sure if one ever existed for it. The filling hole has a raised rim and is surrounded by a border of projecting and sunken circles. Below the filling hole is an incised Meroitic emblem measuring 2.54 cm wide x 2.7 cm long (Fig 2.14). Like MFA 24.959, this emblem has a similar lower half, with two horizontal lines through which pass an upside down "Y". The top half of this design is a *wedjat*-eye above a thin crescent shape. The emblem appears to be chased.<sup>24</sup> An acanthus-leaf flame guard has a slight "S" curve and is triangular in shape with frayed looking edges (Figs 2.11 & 2.15). The acanthus leaf has veins originating at the base of the guard with a larger central vein in the center, and measures 20.32 cm tall. The iron rod (also replaced in modern times) is attached to the block behind the flame guard that essentially went "through" the leaf. A scalloped design was placed at the bottom of the acanthus leaf where the rod joined the block.

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<sup>20</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, V, 202.

<sup>21</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 57. I favor a second century date, which places the lamp in the same period as MFA 23.959.

<sup>22</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, V, 203.

<sup>23</sup> The measurement of height refers only to the base and body of the lamp and does not include the hook and rod or the acanthus leaf flame guard.

<sup>24</sup> Personal correspondence with Susanne Gänsicke, Conservator, Object Conservator, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. October 22, 2008.

The rod was attached to the lamp at an angle and was topped by a griffin-headed hook.<sup>25</sup> At the bottom of the rod is a decorative base in the shape of a ball with two stacked disks above and three stacked disks below. The fluted handle was attached at the top of the flame guard as well as the block behind the flame guard (Fig. 2.16). The acanthus leaf, rod, and handle were all attached directly to the bronze block, which was soldered onto the body of the lamp.

In the West Cemetery, in burial Beg. W. 110, another hanging bronze oil lamp (MFA 24.968) was found by George Reisner and Dows Dunham. Reisner dated Beg. W. 110 roughly between 83 AD and 246 AD,<sup>26</sup> but today the Museum of Fine Arts assigns the lamp a date of 270 BC-320 AD (Fig. 1.3).<sup>27</sup> Although it was a hanging lamp similar to the previous two lamps described, the hook was a snake's head instead of a griffin head. For this lamp, Dunham gave his simplest description yet: "Small bronze hanging lamp with hook (iron rod corroded out)."<sup>28</sup> The lamp measures 17.78 cm long x 4.76 cm tall.<sup>29</sup> The nozzle of the lamp is 7.62 cm long and has a pronounced lip. No lid was preserved, nor was there evidence of any hinged attachments. The filling hole does not have a rim or a decorative border. Below the filling hole is an incised Meroitic emblem with the same two horizontal lines and upside down "Y" as seen in the previous two lamps, and the same crescent shape as MFA 24.966 (Fig 2.17). The uppermost part of this emblem is similar in shape to a diamond enclosed within is a very small *ankh* symbol. The emblem is 1.27 cm at its widest x 1.78 cm long. This emblem appears to have been

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<sup>25</sup> The iron rod and griffin headed hook were not present during my personal examination of this lamp, but photos showed the griffin had incised hair and eyes (complete with pupils).

<sup>26</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, IV, 225.

<sup>27</sup> Museum of Fine Arts Boston, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?recview=true&id=145862](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=145862). The website does not offer any support for its dates, and I am unsure what the MFA dates are based on.

<sup>28</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, V, 225.

<sup>29</sup> This measurement does not include the flame guard or base, since it is no longer attached to the body of the lamp. The height of the lamp with the base and acanthus leaf was 17.3 centimeters.

engraved into the surface of the lamp.<sup>30</sup> The acanthus-leaf flame guard is flat, pointed, and triangular; it measures 11.43 cm long (Fig 2.18). Drilled holes separate the tri-lobed edges of the acanthus leaf. A ring-shaped handle has a double ring pattern with a horizontal band near the bottom. The original iron rod has corroded out, and has not been replaced. However, the bronze snake-headed hook has survived. It is 7.94 cm tall and finely detailed. The snake has an incised mouth, eyes, nostrils, and scales (the scales on the back of the snake are rendered differently than those on the belly of the snake) (Figs. 2.19 & 2.20). The base of the hook is diamond shaped with two stacked disks on top and bottom. Dunham estimated the height of the lamp with the rod and hook to be 36.0 cm.<sup>31</sup> There is a base where the rod would have attached to the bronze block but it has been damaged. There is a design on the base, but I can not determine what the design looked like as a whole. As with both of the previous lamps, the flame guard, iron rod, and handle are all attached to a bronze block that was soldered to the body of the lamp. The bell-shaped base is no longer attached to the body of the lamp; it measures 3.81 cm tall x 9.21 cm wide.

The fourth and final lamp was also found in the West Cemetery. It was the only lamp that was not excavated by George Reisner and Dows Dunham; it was discovered by John Garstang in tomb M 803. It is currently owned by the National Museum of Sudan in Khartoum; therefore I could not examine it personally (Fig. 2.21).<sup>32</sup> Garstang did not work with, nor use the same abbreviation system of Reisner hence the different tomb identification.<sup>33</sup> Unfortunately,

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<sup>30</sup> Personal correspondence with Susanne Gänsicke, Conservator, Object Conservator, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. October 22, 2008.

<sup>31</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vol. V, 225.

<sup>32</sup> K.A. Grzymski, *Meroë Reports I* (Mississauga: Benben Publications, 2003), 77-80. This text includes a list of objects excavated by Garstang now owned by the National Museum of Sudan. Only one bronze lamp is mentioned; "Bronze lamp with incised design, large leaf at back and a long handle; presumably from M 294." However, the burial numbers do not match and no mention is made of the griffin-headed hook.

<sup>33</sup> Török, *Meroë City*, 274.

Garstang's excavations were marred by poor record keeping.<sup>34</sup> I could not find a date for the burial, but the lamp has been widely dated between the end of the first century BC and the end of the first century AD. Garstang described the lamp as Hellenistic in character, with a griffin-headed hanging hook, a corroded rod (no mention was made if this rod was made of iron), a bell-shaped base, and an acanthus leaf flame guard. The condition of the lamp makes it difficult to tell if any of the decoration consisted of Meroitic emblems. László Török, however, considered this oil lamp to be the same type as those previously discussed which is why it is included in this study.<sup>35</sup> In a sketch of the lamp from M 803 by Schliephack, he notes that the length of the lamp is 30 cm, and the hook is 10 cm high.<sup>36</sup>

The four lamps may have been based on a pattern. Each of the lamps display certain common features, such as the acanthus leaf flame guard and hanging hooks. However, the lamps are all different sizes, and have differing bases, and different Meroitic emblems. The acanthus-leaf motif even varies from lamp to lamp, which suggests that the artists responsible for the lamps differed on the individual details.

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<sup>34</sup> Stanley M. Burstein, "The Kingdom of Meroë," in *Africa and Africans in Antiquity*, ed. Edwin M. Yamauchi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 135.

<sup>35</sup> Török, *Meroë City*, 274-275.

<sup>36</sup> László Török, *Meroë City: An Ancient African Capital Part Two: Figures and Plates* (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1997) Figure 143.





Figure 2.1: Detail of rosette lid (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.2: Detail of Meroitic emblem (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.3: Acanthus leaf flame guard (MFA 24.959)





Figure 2.4: Profile view of the flame guard which illustrates the curvature of the leaf (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.5: Detail of Meroitic inscription on the back of the flame guard (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.6: Profile view of ring handle (MFA 24.959)





Figure 2.7: Griffin-headed hanging hook with vegetal base (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.8: Detail of griffin's face (MFA 24.959)





Figure 2.9: Detail of incised hair on the griffin (MFA 24.959)



Figure 2.10: Detail of decorative base connecting the iron rod to the body of the lamp (MFA 24.959)





Figure 2.11: Body of oil lamp (MFA 24.966)



Figure 2.12: Top view of nozzle with folded decorative motif visible on the front of the lip (MFA 24.966)



Figure 2.13: Detail of pattern of the decorative motif on the underside of the nozzle from (MFA 24.966)





Figure 2.14: Meroitic emblem (MFA 24.966)



Figure 2.15: Acanthus leaf flame guard (MFA 24.966)



Figure 2.16: Handle (MFA 24.966)





Figure 2.17: Meroitic emblem (MFA 24.968)



Figure 2.18: Acanthus leaf flame guard (MFA 24.968)



Figure 2.19: Detail of snake-headed hanging hook (MFA 224.968)



Figure 2.20: Detail of the snake's facial features (MFA 24.968)



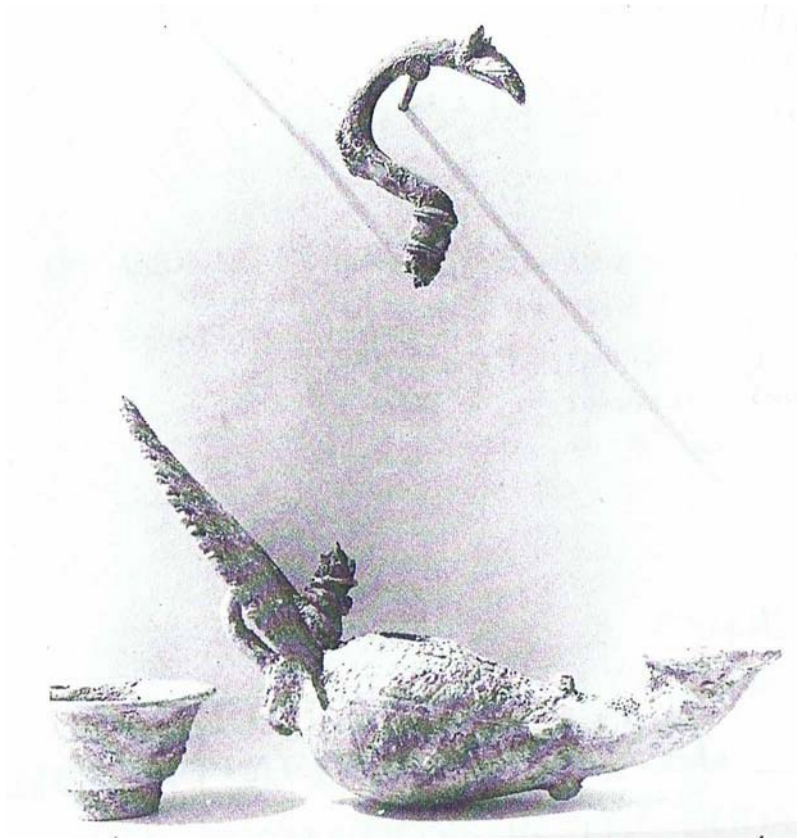


Figure 2.21: Bronze oil lamp excavated by John Garstang, now owned by the National Museum of Sudan

### 3-STYLE

Meroitic artists did not follow a specific set of stylistic criteria. Unfortunately, this means that the modern scholar has a great deal of trouble determining if an object is Meroitic in style. In addition, Meroitic artists were capable of adopting and adapting foreign influence to create a blended style all their own.<sup>37</sup> This is exactly the dilemma with the four bronze oil lamps discussed in this paper. A deeper look into the history of the lamps may seem unnecessary because the Hellenistic traits of these lamps are overwhelming. However, at least three of the lamps, MFA 24.959, MFA 24.966, and MFA 24.968 display Meroitic emblems, with one exhibiting an inscription in cursive Meroitic. Were the Hellenistic motifs common during the same time period as the lamps? Were they found throughout the Hellenistic world? Were they commonly used on oil lamps? The Meroitic emblems, as well as the Hellenistic features, griffin head, acanthus leaf, and rosette, deserve deeper discussion.

The lamps from Meroë, with the exception of the lamp in Khartoum, have an emblem underneath the filling hole.<sup>38</sup> Each of these emblems can be divided into the top and bottom half, with the top parts differing and the bottoms more or less identical. The bottom of the emblems found on MFA 24.959, MFA 24.966, and MFA 24.968 resemble a table or stand, consisting of an upside “Y” with two to three horizontal lines bisecting the straight segment of the “Y”. László Török suggests that this half of the emblem may represent a very simplified altar or sacrificial table.<sup>39</sup> Meroitic emblems can be found on at least 33 objects excavated from the North and West cemeteries in Meroë. These emblems are found on a variety of objects and media: pottery vessels, plaster jar stoppers, and silver and bronze objects.<sup>40</sup> Dows Dunham

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<sup>37</sup> Wenig, *Africa in Antiquity*, 65.

<sup>38</sup> The lamp in Khartoum may have a Meroitic emblem that is not visible on the single photograph available.

<sup>39</sup> Török, “Property Marks,” 38.

<sup>40</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vols., IV and V.

stated that several types of Meroitic emblems were found in 33 tombs, 13 of them were in royal burials.<sup>41</sup> The emblems were either painted or incised onto the object. The one exception to this was MFA 24.959 on which the emblem was cast in raised relief.<sup>42</sup>

On lamp MFA 24.959 the top half of the emblem shows an acanthus leaf within a circle. The acanthus leaf was found on a total of four objects, one in the West cemetery and three in the North cemetery.<sup>43</sup> On either side of the circle is a *was* scepter. The *was* scepter is an Egyptian symbol for the power of the king, and was used since the Early Dynastic period.<sup>44</sup> The scepter is forked at the bottom with a stylized animal head at the top. Török suggests that the circle around the acanthus leaf might be a modified version of the cartouche or *shen* ring,<sup>45</sup> symbols of permanence, eternity, and rejuvenation.<sup>46</sup> Since this lamp was found in a royal burial, it is possible that the circle does represent a cartouche. The emblem from MFA 24.966 also has an Egyptian symbol above the bottom half: the *wedjat* eye, the representation of the eye of the god Horus, a popular symbol of regeneration.<sup>47</sup> The eye sits on top of a crescent shape, which in turn sits on the horizontal lines of the bottom half of the emblem. The *wedjat* eye was only found on one object: MFA 24.966. The final emblem on MFA 24.968 is a small *ankh*-sign inside of a diamond shape that sits atop a crescent above the horizontal lines and upside “Y” that make up the bottom of the emblem. The *ankh* symbol, meaning life in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, was popular in Meroë, and is found on at least seven of the 33 objects from the Meroitic cemeteries.<sup>48</sup>

These emblems raise an interesting question: what do they mean? We do not know what purpose they served, though various suggestions have been offered by scholars over the years.

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<sup>41</sup> Dows Dunham, “A collection ‘Pot-Marks’ from Kush and Nubia,” *Kush* 13 (1956), 131.

<sup>42</sup> Török, “Property Marks,” 43.

<sup>43</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vols., IV and V.

<sup>44</sup> Regine Schulz and Matthias Seidel, eds., *Egypt: The World of the Pharaohs* (Köln: Könemann, 1998), 520.

<sup>45</sup> Török, “Property Marks,” 39.

<sup>46</sup> Schulz, *Egypt*, 513, 519.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 514.

<sup>48</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vols., IV and V.

Dows Dunham believed that they must have held a certain meaning and was the first to tackle the issue of these emblems. He deduced that they could not be maker's marks for several reasons. First, they occur on a variety of media: he did not think that the bronze worker, silversmith, and potter would employ the same emblems.<sup>49</sup> Török agreed with Dunham and noted that the marks were larger than most other maker's marks from the same period. He offered instead that the emblems were used as decoration. Török also added that it is impossible to believe a craftsman would use a royal or divine symbol such as the *was* scepter, as part of his mark.<sup>50</sup> Dunham offered the hypothesis that the emblems demarcate products created by local craftsmen for funerary purposes. Dunham noted that this is only a suggestion and further research would be needed to understanding these marks.<sup>51</sup> P.L. Shinnie was inclined to agree with Dunham's hypothesis that the emblems were used as heraldic devices to designate the objects as funerary. Contrary to this, he also claimed that a similar emblem found on a bronze beaker was most likely a maker's mark, or even an owner's mark.<sup>52</sup> Török disagreed entirely with Dunham and gave three reasons why these emblems could not denote funerary equipment: 1) objects from the same tomb can have different emblems; 2) objects from different tombs have identical emblems; and finally 3) emblems from royal burials were also present in non-royal burials. In Török's opinion, the emblems are royal treasury marks. He supports this hypothesis by stating that objects belonging to the ruler's treasury might have the same emblem on a variety of media. He also suggests the objects found with royal emblems in non-royal tombs were most likely gifts from the ruler, while emblems with non-royal emblems were simply trying to emulate

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<sup>49</sup> Dunham, "Pot-Marks," 146.

<sup>50</sup> Török, "Property Marks," 41.

<sup>51</sup> Dunham, "Pot-Marks," 131.

<sup>52</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 128, 127.



royal treasury marks.<sup>53</sup> Unfortunately for Török's theory, Dunham uncovered a photograph depicting multiple acanthus leaf emblems on the chapel wall of the pyramid Beg. N. 17 in Meroë.<sup>54</sup> However, these acanthus leaf emblems were not included in the original decorative program; they were scratched into the wall as graffiti. Dunham dated the chapel wall to the last half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, and believed that the graffiti was added near the end of the Meroitic period, but he did not offer any support for his dating.

The presence of these emblems on a chapel wall weakens Török's theory that they were used to denote objects from the royal treasury. Nevertheless, these emblems must have held a special significance for the Meroitic people. Dunham believed the emblems were proof that the objects were made locally in Meroë.<sup>55</sup> Török did not doubt that the items could be imported, but states that Hellenistic, and specifically Roman styles were fashionable in Meroë during the time period that the emblems were found (33 AD through 165 AD).<sup>56</sup> The griffin, for example, was a common motif used in Greek and Roman art.

The griffin was a mythological composite animal, found throughout the course of Greek history, with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.<sup>57</sup> Three of the four lamps have hanging hooks in the shape of a griffin's head. Jugs with griffin-headed spouts were popular in the Greek Cycladic islands between 675-650 BC, dating to the Orientalizing period.<sup>58</sup> Also from the Orientalizing period are cauldrons with bronze protomes in the form of the head or head and neck of an animal or mythological creature, such as griffins (Fig 3.1).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Török, "Property Marks," 42-43.

<sup>54</sup> Dunham, "Pot-Marks," 147.

<sup>55</sup> Dows Dunham, *The Egyptian Department and its Excavations* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 1958), 130.

<sup>56</sup> Török, "Property Marks," 43-44.

<sup>57</sup> John Griffiths-Pedley, *Greek Art and Archaeology* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education, 2007) 390.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 133. A jug from the island of Aegina has a griffin headed spout.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

Griffins were also popular decoration on Roman oil lamps. In the British Museum, there are eight Greco-Roman clay oil lamps displaying griffins on their discuses (the depressed circular area surrounding the filling hole).<sup>60</sup> Two lamps show a griffin with a Greek god such as Apollo (Q 975) (Figs. 3.2 & 3.3) or Ares (Q 1352) (Figs 3.4 & 3.5).<sup>61</sup> Four lamps dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (Q 767, Q 901, Q 953, and Q 1083) (Figs. 3.6-3.13), and one dating to the late Antonine or Severan Period (Q 1367) show a griffin alone in a galloping or running position (Fig. 3.14 & 3.15). One lamp (Q 755) has a discus decoration consisting of two griffins, two acanthus leaves, and two dolphins (Fig 3.16 & 3.17).<sup>62</sup> Thamér Szentléleký notes that the motif of the galloping griffin was very common on Roman lamps.<sup>63</sup> While I believe that it is clear that griffins were a popular decorative motif used in ancient Greece and Rome, I was able to find only one example of a bronze lamp displaying a griffin (Fig. 3.18). The lamp is 22.5 cm long, and from Cyprus. It dates to the Greco-Roman period and was found on the MFA online catalog (MFA 72.392).<sup>64</sup> The handle is in the shape of the head and neck of a griffin and it was cast separately and curves above the body of the lamp. The griffin has a tufted mane, and the shape of the head is very similar to that of a horse. Unfortunately this griffin does not resemble the griffins from the Meroitic lamps. In addition, the griffin of MFA 72.392 formed the handle of the lamp and was not a hanging hook as in the Meroitic lamps. Griffins were just one type of popular motif in Greco-Roman art. A second Hellenistic motif found on the lamps was the acanthus leaf.

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<sup>60</sup> D.M. Bailey, *A Catalog of the Lamps in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications, 1980), 6, 11, 14, 41-42.

<sup>61</sup> Bailey, *A Catalog*, 11, 14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-42.

<sup>63</sup> Thamér Szentléleký, *Ancient Lamps*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1969) 69, 71. Yet another clay lamp with a galloping griffin discus decoration can be found in the private collection of L. Basch, and was most likely created in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.

<sup>64</sup> Museum of Fine arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?recview=true&id=153125](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=153125).

Acanthus leaves decorate the flame guard on all four of the lamps discussed in this paper. These leaves were also found in some of the Meroitic emblems discussed above. At the Lion Temple in the Meroitic city of Naqa dating from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the early 1<sup>st</sup> century AD,<sup>65</sup> a relief on the side of a pylon shows the lion-headed god Apedemak emerging from an acanthus plant (Fig. 3.19 & 3.20). This context suggests that the Meroitic people adopted the acanthus leaf as a religious symbol.<sup>66</sup> The relief at Naqa depicted the god Apedemak as a combination of a lion and a snake. The head and torso of a lion attaches to the body of a snake and rises out of a calyx or acanthus. The combination of lion and snake is a Meroitic motif and is also found at another Meroitic site.<sup>67</sup>

Acanthus leaves were also popular motifs to use on oil lamps throughout the ancient world. Examples from Greek<sup>68</sup> and Roman settlements in Italy<sup>69</sup> and Egypt exist.<sup>70</sup> The British Museum has nine clay lamps with acanthus leaf flame guards (Figs. 3.21-3.31) and one lamp with acanthus leaves in its discus decoration.<sup>71</sup> Each of the nine lamps has a triangular shaped flame guard displaying an acanthus leaf (Q 994, Q 996, Q 999, Q 1005, Q 1020, Q1023, Q 1024, Q 1044, and Q 1045).<sup>72</sup> The acanthus leaf size varies from lamp to lamp, but is distinguishable from flame guards with ivy leaves (Q 995), since the acanthus leaves have a rounded shape at the edges of their leaves, and the ivy leaves are angular and frayed.<sup>73</sup> Lamps Q 994 and Q 1044 date between the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD,<sup>74</sup> lamp Q 996 and Q 999 are from the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 89.

<sup>66</sup> Török, "Property Marks," 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> Wenig, *Africa*, 69-70

<sup>68</sup> Bailey, *A Catalog*, 203.

<sup>69</sup> J.W. Hayes, *Ancient Lamps in the Royal Ontario Museum*. (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1980), 47.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 100, 104.

<sup>71</sup> Bailey, *A Catalog*, 130. One of the lamps, Q 755, was discussed. This is the only lamp discussed that uses the acanthus leaf in the discus decoration

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-207, 211, 217-220.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, plate 27, 35.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 202, 220.

century AD,<sup>75</sup> Q 1005 dates to *circa* 30-70 AD,<sup>76</sup> Q 1020 is *circa* 40-90 AD,<sup>77</sup> and 1045 can be dated to no later than the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.<sup>78</sup>

The Royal Ontario Museum also contains five clay lamps with acanthus-leaf flame guards. These range in date from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>79</sup> Four more acanthus-shaped flame guards can be found in Thamér Szentléleky's book, *Ancient Lamps*.<sup>80</sup> One of the pieces is a hanging bronze lamp (Fig. 3. 32). The lamp had an acanthus-leaf-shaped flame guard with suspension rings to which a chain could be attached to hang the lamp. The lamp was probably manufactured some time between the mid 1<sup>st</sup> century and early 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>81</sup> The widespread use of the acanthus leaf motif in the Hellenistic world attests to its popularity. It is clear that the popularity of the acanthus leaf was felt throughout the Hellenistic world as far away as Meroë. However, the most widespread Hellenistic motif used on the lamps was the rosette.

The final Hellenistic motif found on at least one of the lamps is the rosette design. Lamp MFA 24.959 was the only example from Meroë to be found with a lid. The lid was decorated with a rosette design. Rosettes were found on a multitude of objects in the Hellenistic world from jewelry to ceramic vessels, architectural elements, and oil lamps. In ancient Greece, rosettes are found as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>82</sup> They were a commonly found motif, filling in

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 203, 205.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>78</sup> Bailey, *A Catalog*., 220.

<sup>79</sup> Hayes, *Ancient Lamp*, 47, 97-98, 100-101, 104, 136. Note that this text uses acanthus and palmette interchangeably.

<sup>80</sup> Szentléleky had each of these lamps as belonging to the MFA, Boston. However, I could not find a record of them on the MFA online catalog. The book was published in 1969, and it is possible that these four pieces have been sold.

<sup>81</sup> Szentléleky, *Ancient Lamps*, 144.

<sup>82</sup> Griffiths-Pedley, *Greek Art*, 22-23.

empty spaces on Greek Orientalizing painted ceramic pieces,<sup>83</sup> and were even used on painted panels decorating the temple of Apollo at Thermon.<sup>84</sup>

There are many examples of rosettes on ancient oil lamps. Szentl  ky lists 15 lamps with rosette designs in his *Ancient Lamps*. Twelve are in the collections of the MFA and three are in the private collection of L. Basch. These lamps come from all over the Mediterranean world including examples from Asia Minor and North Africa (most likely made in Alexandria). The lamps date to as late as the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>85</sup> The British Museum has 17 examples of lamps with rosette designs (Figs 3.33-3.34). Dates for these lamps range from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC all the way to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>86</sup> The ROM has 23 examples of lamps with rosette designs. These date from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, and were found in Italy, North Africa, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, Cyprus, and Palestine.<sup>87</sup> All of the lamps from the British Museum, and the ROM, and those from *Ancient Lamps*, have the rosette design on the body of the lamp. Most included it in the discus decoration around the filling hole. Given the extremely wide range of dates and the number of locations, we may conclude that the rosette was the most popular of the three Hellenistic motifs discussed, and the most quintessentially Hellenistic element found on the lamps. The four Meroitic lamps, despite their own wide date ranges, fit safely into the time period the rosette covers.

The four lamps found in Mero   all display a unique blend of local and foreign features. Meroitic artists copied foreign styles and used them with local features, like the Meroitic emblems found on three of the four oil lamps in Mero  . The Hellenistic features displayed on these lamps were common throughout the history of the Hellenistic world and were found all

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 127, 131.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>85</sup> Szentl  ky, *Ancient Lamps*, 119-120, 126-127.

<sup>86</sup> Bailey, *A Catalog*, 29, 86-88, 130, 177-178, 295, 337.

<sup>87</sup> Hayes, *Ancient Lamps*, 49, 66, 95, 87-88, 70, 79, and 91-92.

over the Mediterranean basin. Due to the widespread use of the griffin, acanthus, and rosette, it is plausible that these features could have made their way to Meroë. The griffin can be found early in Greek history, and is often found on lamps as decoration. Like the Meroitic lamps, MFA 72. 392 only depicted the head and neck of the griffin. However, the griffin was incorporated into the handle of the lamp and used not as a hanging hook. I was able to find many acanthus-leaf flame guards dating from the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD- the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, this corresponds to the time the Meroitic lamps were made. Most of the examples I found were clay lamps. These lamps had triangular flame guards that had been pressed into molds with an acanthus design. The only bronze examples I found were from two lamps from Rome. The flame guards on these lamps are not similar in shape to the ones on the Meroitic lamps, and have much less detail. The rosette design on MFA 24.959 is used in a manner very close to other lamps exhibiting rosette designs. Many lamps had the rosette placed around the filling hole of the lamp. MFA 24.959 used the rosette as the design for the lid of its filling hole. The griffin, acanthus, and rosette were all popular and widely used during the period that the four Meroitic lamps were created. Thus, the presence of the Meroitic emblems alongside Hellenistic features can be seen as an example of Meroitic artists creating a style unique to the region by blending traits from different cultures.



Figure 3.1: Bronze griffin protome



Figure 3.2: Discus decoration drawing (Q 975)



Figure 3.3: Discus decoration (Q 975)



Figure 3.4: Discus decoration drawing (Q 135).





Figure. 3.5: Discus decoration (Q 1352)



Figure. 3.6: Discus decoration drawing (Q 767)



Figure 3.7: Discus decoration (Q 767)



Figure 3.8: Discus decoration drawing (Q 901)



Figure 3.9: Discus decoration (Q 901)



Figure 3.10: Discus decoration drawing Q 953



Figure 3.11: Discus decoration (Q 953)



Figure 3.12: Discus decoration drawing (Q 1083)



Figure 3.13: Discus decoration (Q 1083)



Figure 3.14: Discus decoration drawing (Q 1367)



Figure 3.15: Discus decoration (Q 1367)



Figure 3.16: Discus decoration drawing (Q 755)



Figure 3.17: Discus decoration (Q 755)



Figure 3.18: Lamp with Two Spouts. Cypriote, Greco-Roman Period. Bronze. Length: 22.5 cm (8 7/8 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. General Funds (72.392)

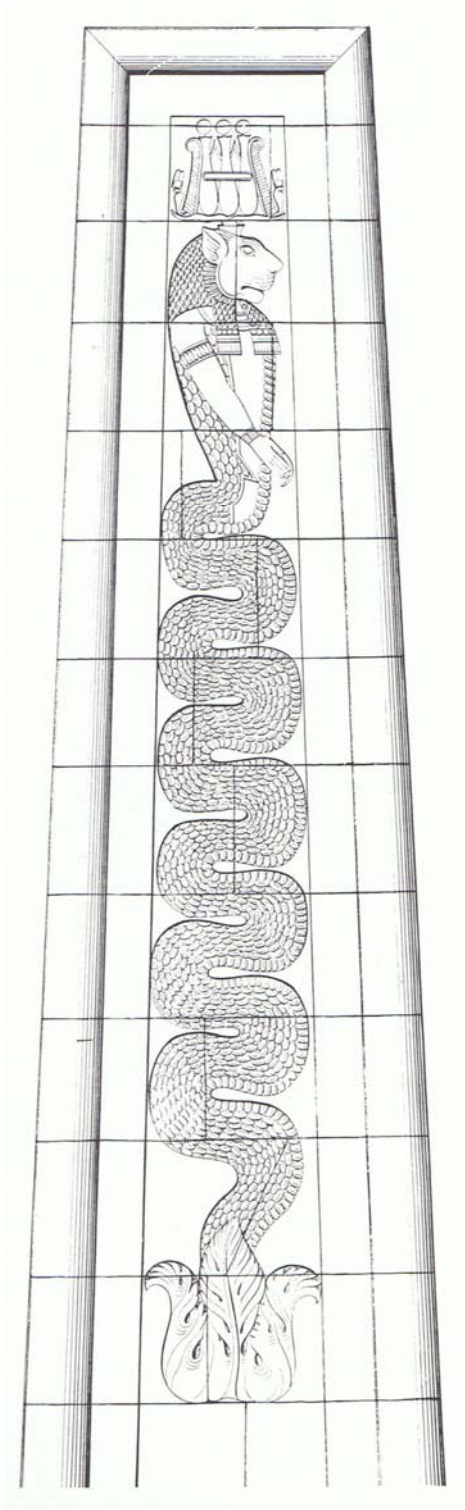


Figure 3.19: Line drawing of Lion Temple pylon relief with Apedemak emerging from an acanthus plant





Figure 3.20: Image of Lion Temple pylon relief with Apedemak emerging from an acanthus plant



Figure 3.21: Flame guard (Q 994)



Figure 3.22: Flame guard (Q 996)



Figure 3.23: Flame guard (Q 999)





Figure 3.24: Flame guard (Q 1005)



Figure 3.25: Flame guard (Q 1020)



Figure 3.26: Flame guard (Q 1023)



Figure 3.27: Flame guard (Q 1024)



Figure 3.28: Flame guard (Q 1044)

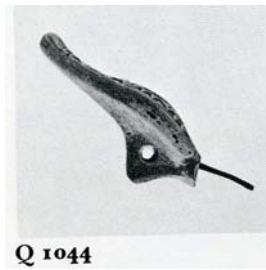


Figure 3.29: Profile view, showing curvature of the flame guard (Q 1044)



Figure 3.30: Flame guard (Q 1045)



Figure 3.31: Profile, showing curvature of the flame guard (Q 1045)



Figure 3.32: Bronze hanging lamp

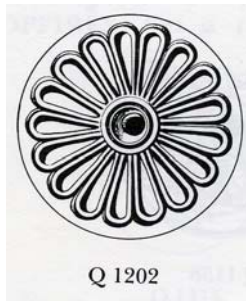


Figure 3.33: Example of a rosette design surrounding the filling hole of a clay oil lamp from the British Museum (Q 1202)



Figure 3.34: Clay oil lamp with rosette design surrounding its filling hole (Q 1202)

#### 4-CULTURAL TRANSMISSION BETWEEN ROME AND MEROË

The four bronze oil lamps found in Meroë can tell us a great deal about the transmission of culture in the Hellenistic world. By examining the history of contact and trade between Meroë and the Hellenistic world, we can explore the possibility that the lamps were imported to Meroë. On the other hand, we can examine whether the lamps were created in Meroë by foreign craftsmen residing in Meroë or by local Meroitic craftsmen. Exploring all of these possibilities could help us understand how the transmission of culture, religion, language, and artistic models changed as each moved away from the center of the Hellenistic world and out towards the center of the Meroitic world.

One possibility is that all four lamps were imports to Meroë from the Roman Empire. After the fall of Marc Antony and Cleopatra, in 30 BC Rome took control of Egypt.<sup>88</sup> Negotiations were held in 28 AD at Philae between the Romans and Meroites,<sup>89</sup> which established the border between the two to be drawn at Aswan. Meroë was designated a client kingdom, which was common when Rome did not care to control their frontier lands directly.<sup>90</sup> The earliest artistic links between Meroë and Rome were probably around 24 BC after a border dispute. The multilingual text (using Latin, Greek, and Egyptian hieroglyphs) erected at Philae Temple<sup>91</sup> by the first Prefect of Egypt, Cornelius Gallus, celebrated his victory in the border disputes with Meroë. In the Latin section of the text, Gallus claimed that the king of Meroë had been taken under Roman protection. However, the Greek section hints at a more diplomatic

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<sup>88</sup> J. Ferguson and L. Thomson, eds., *African in Classical Antiquity* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press 1969), 38.

<sup>89</sup> Fritz Hintz, "The Meroitic Period," in *African in Antiquity: The Arts of Ancient Nubia and Sudan, vol. 1*, edited by Sylvia Hochfield and Elizabeth Riefstahl, (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1978), 99.

<sup>90</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 68.

<sup>91</sup> The actual inscription was found in the Temple of Augustus on the island of Philae. It had been broken and used as paving slabs. See Laurence Kirwan, *Studies on the history of Late Antique and Christian Nubia*, edited by T. Hägg, László Török, and D.A. Welsby, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), 20.

relationship, calling the Prefect a “public friend” of the Meroitic king.<sup>92</sup> In 25 AD, the second Prefect of Egypt, Aelius Gallus, was ordered to conquer Arabia and Kush (another name for the kingdom of Meroë). While Gallus was in Arabia, completing the first part of his mission,<sup>93</sup> the Meroitic forces (30,000 men strong according to Strabo)<sup>94</sup> took advantage of the depleted Roman forces and captured Aswan, Philae, and Elephantine in 24 AD. The Meroities even took spoils from Aswan, including statues of Augustus,<sup>95</sup> and slaves. In that same year, the third Prefect of Egypt, Gaius Petronius, was able to push the Meroites back to Pselchis<sup>96</sup> with the help of 800 horses and 10,000 infantry.<sup>97</sup> Petronius sent representatives to demand reasons for the Meroitic attack and compensation for the damage done.<sup>98</sup> The Meroites complained that they had been mistreated by the local Egyptian governors, the nomarchs.<sup>99</sup> When Petronius informed the Meroites that Caesar Augustus was the ruler of the land and not the nomarchs, the Meroities did not reply for three days. Petronius then initiated another attack on the Meroitic forces. The Romans easily beat the Meroites back again, and marched south towards the city of Napata.<sup>100</sup> According to Strabo, Napata was the city from which the queen of Meroë, the Candace,<sup>101</sup> ruled. The Candace was not in the city at the time, but her son the prince Akinidad was in Napata. Strabo indicates that because she wanted to protect her son from being captured, she was forced to sue for peace. She sent an envoy to Petronius offering to return their prisoners of war and the

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<sup>92</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 145. This may be due to the Roman author may have had propagandistic goals, while the Greek author had no agenda.

<sup>93</sup> Hintz, “Meroitic,” 100.

<sup>94</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 68.

<sup>95</sup> Hintz, “Meroitic,” 100. A bronze head of Augustus was in fact found in Meroë, and is considered to be part of one of the plundered statues.

<sup>96</sup> Strabo, *The Geography*, 267.

<sup>97</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 68.

<sup>98</sup> Strabo, *The Geography*, 268.

<sup>99</sup> Ferguson, *Africa*, 38.

<sup>100</sup> Strabo, *The Geography*, 268.

<sup>101</sup> Candace is the Hellenized version of *Kandake*, the Meroitic word which means queen or queen mother. Roman writers believed that “Candace” was a traditional first name passed down through Meroitic queens and often refer to the queens as Candace, instead of the Candace. See Shinnie, *Meroë*, 19.

statues of Augustus. Petronius responded by capturing Napata and destroying it, although he was unable to capture Prince Akinidad. Petronius returned to Alexandria taking with him the newly enslaved inhabitants of Napata. In response the Candace attacked the garrison in Premnis<sup>102</sup> set up by Petronius. When Petronius returned to meet the attack, the Meroites sent an envoy to enter into negotiations with him. Petronius ordered them to report to Caesar Augustus if they wanted peace. The Meroitic envoy told Petronius that they did not know who Caesar was, nor did they know where to find him, so Petronius appointed an ambassador to take the Meroitic envoy to Augustus.<sup>103</sup> The Meroitic envoy traveled to the Greek island of Samos to meet with Augustus. In 21 or 20 BC, a peace treaty was drawn up that was extremely favorable to Meroë.<sup>104</sup> Meroë was no longer required to pay tribute to Rome. They annexed the land between Aswan and the kingdom of Meroë, and established the border at Hieria Scyaminos.<sup>105</sup> A Meroitic viceroy, possibly Crown Prince Akinidad,<sup>106</sup> was appointed by the Romans to rule over the Triakintaschoinos,<sup>107</sup> an area that reached roughly 130 kilometers south from Aswan in Egypt.<sup>108</sup> This area was in Lower Nubia, while Meroë was in Upper Nubia. The peace treaty seems to have ensured peace for the next 300 years, with no evidence for further military clashes between the Meroites and Romans.<sup>109</sup>

The clash between Meroë and Rome was not the first instance of Meroitic contacts with the Greco-Roman world. Pliny the Elder claimed that six men traveled to the Meroitic Kingdom

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<sup>102</sup> Premnis is the Hellenized name for modern day Qasr Ibrim. See Hintz, "Meroitic," 100.

<sup>103</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 268-269.

<sup>104</sup> Hintz, "Meroitic," 100.

<sup>105</sup> László Török, *The Kingdom of Kush* (New York: Brill, 1997), 454-455.

<sup>106</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, 21.

<sup>107</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 68.

<sup>108</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 66.

<sup>109</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 69-70.

and wrote of their experiences.<sup>110</sup> Stanley Burstein argued that Alexander the Great sent an expedition to Meroë, led by Callisthenes, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. He also suggests that there was a Meroitic embassy to Alexander in 324 BC, which presumably traveled to Alexandria.<sup>111</sup> In the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, contacts between Meroë and Ptolemaic Egypt are better documented. Despite a fragment of papyrus mentioning a Meroitic attack on Ptolemaic forces near Aswan, Ptolemy II initiated an attack on Meroë with the goal of securing trade routes to supply elephants to the Hellenistic forces. Ptolemy II needed elephants to fight against the war elephants used by the Persians.

For most of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Meroë and Hellenistic Egypt had close and peaceful relations.<sup>112</sup> During this time, reports filed by the Ptolemaic diplomats, military personnel, and explorers enabled a vast amount of information on Meroë to become known in Hellenistic Egypt.<sup>113</sup> Meroitic tribute bearers may have also traveled to Alexandria in the mid-270s BC. By the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC the close ties between Meroë and Hellenistic Egypt faded. This may have been caused in part by the poor performance of Ptolemy II's war elephants. The elimination of the elephant trade could have caused the decline in contact between Ptolemaic Egypt and Meroë.<sup>114</sup> This period, along with the Roman Period mentioned above (mid 1<sup>st</sup> century BC- early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD), represent the two climaxes of contact between Meroë and the

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<sup>110</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 475. While unsure of the exact dates that these Hellenistic explorers traveled to Meroë, it is likely to be after Meroë established peace with Augustus.

<sup>111</sup> Stanley M. Burstein, "The Hellenistic Fringe: The Case of Meroë," in *Hellenistic history and Culture*, edited by Peter Green, 38-66 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 41. Burstein admits that his Callisthenes theory has found few followers.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-45.

<sup>113</sup> Stanley M. Burstein, "The Origins of the Napatan State in Classical Sources," *Meroitica* 15, ed. by Steffen Wenig (1999), 121, Paper presented at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference for Meroitic Research, Berlin, Germany, September 1992.

<sup>114</sup> Burstein, "Fringe," 46-47.



Hellenistic world. The majority of classical and classicizing objects found at Meroë date from the Roman period.<sup>115</sup>

During the reign of Emperor Nero, a band of Roman troops were sent to explore the whole length of the Nile between 54 and 68 AD. These soldiers traveled south from Aswan all the way to Meroë, and then proceeded even further south.<sup>116</sup> The exact purpose of this expedition varies in recorded accounts by two Roman writers, Seneca and Pliny. Seneca, who was also Nero's tutor, wrote his *Natural History* in 62-63 AD,<sup>117</sup> and claims to have interviewed the two centurions who made the trip to Meroë.<sup>118</sup> They said they had met the king of Meroë, and that he was kind enough to arrange a military escort to take the soldiers further south and to provide introductions to the tribes in contact with Meroë. Nero sent his exploration party in the autumn of 61 AD.<sup>119</sup> Seneca's account dated to 63 AD, which corresponded to the rule of King Amanitenmemide (50-62 AD).<sup>120</sup> Reports of the friendly contact between the centurions and the King of Meroë brings up questions about Seneca's account. In order to verbally interact with the king, the Romans either had an interpreter or translator with them, or the expedition had more than the two centurions with some knowledge of the Meroitic spoken language. In addition, the military support from the Meroitic king and his recommendations to other tribes turned Roman exploration into a joint venture.<sup>121</sup> It certainly seems that the relations between Meroë and Rome at this time were close. Seneca claimed that the reason for Nero's expedition was geographical, mainly concerned with searching for the source of the Nile. However, it is also possible that Nero used the guise of geography to assess the commercial prospects of the Meroitic kingdom.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>116</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 55.

<sup>117</sup> Stanley M. Burstein, "Alexander, Callisthenes, and the Sources of the Nile," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 17 (1976), 141.

<sup>118</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, 73.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 26-29.

<sup>120</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 209.

<sup>121</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, 73.

Pliny's account differed greatly from Seneca's. Pliny claimed that the group traveling to Meroë was part of the Praetorian Guard under the leadership of a tribune. Nero's reason for sending these troops was to determine if an attack on the Meroitic kingdom would be profitable.<sup>122</sup> Pliny wrote that the troops met the Candace who was ruling Meroë. After King Amanitenmemide's reign, Queen Amanikhatahan became the next monarch of Meroë.<sup>123</sup> The discrepancies between Seneca and Pliny's accounts have led some scholars to believe that there were actually two different trips made to Meroë, one occurring in 61-62 AD and one in 66 or 67 AD.<sup>124</sup> Laurence Kirwan favored Pliny's account over Seneca's, but he believed that Nero wanted to use military force to protect Roman trade routes through Meroë into central Africa from the rising threat of the Kingdom of Axum.<sup>125</sup> Pliny claimed the expeditions were undertaken to determine if Nubia, and the lands south of Nubia, were worth conquest. Nero's main interest may have been to continue the flow of African goods into the Roman world. However, it seemed that Rome felt there was nothing to be gained from military occupation, because the major trade routes moved to the Red Sea by the time of the expeditions.<sup>126</sup> This seems to discredit the idea of Meroë being a large Roman trading hub. Between the time the peace treaty was signed by Augustus and Nero's expedition, imperial policy had changed. The policy of client kingdoms ruling themselves had gradually changed to one favoring direct control from Rome. It is not difficult to believe that Nero may have been interested in strengthening Roman control over Meroë.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Pliny, *History*, 473.

<sup>123</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 209.

<sup>124</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 70.

<sup>125</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, 26.

<sup>126</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 70.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

Most of the evidence for a Roman presence in Meroë appeared to have been in the form of military garrisons or expeditions. However, there were also political envoys, or embassies, that traveled between Rome and Meroë on diplomatic treks.<sup>128</sup> Evidence that there were Meroitic embassies and tribute bearers visiting the courts of Alexander the Great in 324 BC and Ptolemy II in the 270s BC suggests that there was a long history of political contact between Meroë and the Hellenistic world.<sup>129</sup> Meroitic envoys to Rome held the title of *Apote Aromelis*. The title was found all over the Meroitic kingdom in funerary texts and on temple inscriptions.”<sup>130</sup> Between the years 60 and 56 BC there are references to these Meroitic envoys in Egypt.<sup>131</sup> While the Dodekaschinos was in Lower Nubia, the title was known in Upper Nubia and the individuals who made up the envoy were most likely chosen by the Meroitic rulers.<sup>132</sup> The *Apote Aromelis* was an important title in the Meroitic kingdom throughout the Roman period, and suggests regular contact between Rome and Meroë. A graffito from 253 AD found at Philae shows Pasan, the *Apote Aromelis*, presenting gifts from the Meroitic king, and receiving goods to bring back to Meroë.<sup>133</sup> Edwards has also claimed that these embassies were responsible for facilitating a type of elite trade, or gift exchange, throughout the Mediterranean. This practice had been documented in the Napatan period (the culture period right before Meroë), and seemed to have continued into the Meroitic period. Such examples linked the Meroitic rulers to Roman rulers.<sup>134</sup> Rome would send its envoys to the courts of client kingdoms, such as Meroë, bearing luxurious gifts. An inscription from a pyramid chapel in Meroë claimed that the tomb owner had received gifts from the Roman emperor, who is

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<sup>128</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 157-158.

<sup>129</sup> Burstein, *Fringe*, 42, 47.

<sup>130</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 161.

<sup>131</sup> David N. Edwards, “Meroë and the Sudanic Kingdoms,” *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 2 (1998), 189.

<sup>132</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 167.

<sup>133</sup> Edwards, *Meroë*, 189.

<sup>134</sup> Edwards, *Nubian Past*, 167

described as the Pharaoh of the West.<sup>135</sup> David Edwards believes that many of the luxury items found in Meroitic royal and elite burials were the result of this embassy trade, and not normal market trade since lower classes of the Meroitic population would not have been able to afford to import these items.<sup>136</sup> Pliny claimed that Nero's envoy met a ruling queen, so they may have traveled to Meroë during Queen Amanikhatashan's reign.<sup>137</sup> It seems that items from Queen Amanikhatashan's tomb, dated to 62-85 AD,<sup>138</sup> may have been brought to Meroë by Nero's envoy traveling down the Nile.<sup>139</sup>

Another example of this embassy trade might be found in the Meroitic inscription the back of the acanthus-leaf flame guard from MFA 24.959 (Fig. 2.5). The inscription may be some sort of name, reading *abri-lh-li-so*. Török stated that this inscription meant the "great" or "big man" in the Meroitic language, and could refer to a king. A bowl from the same tomb was also inscribed with the name *Nehror-so*.<sup>140</sup> This appears to have been a common male name in Meroë, but is clearly not the name of King Takideamani, the tomb owner. Since neither of these names matches the king's name, it is possible that they represent individuals presenting the objects as gifts to the king.<sup>141</sup> Welsby argues that objects such as silver vessels decorated with special iconography were probably not traded long distances over the Roman Empire, and these items were most likely given as gifts. He does not specify what the iconography was or whether it was Roman or Meroitic, but it is possible that the iconography he mentions was in the form of the Meroitic emblems found on so many royal and elite grave goods in Meroë- including the four

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>136</sup> Edwards, *Meroë*, 188-189.

<sup>137</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 70.

<sup>138</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 60.

<sup>139</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 55.

<sup>140</sup> For the translations and meaning of the names refer to J. Leclant, ed., *Repertoire d'Epigraphie Méroïtique* (Paris: Diffusion de Boccard, 1975/1980), 821-822. It is possible that it could have been an alternate name for the king, if it is not the king's birth name it could be a throne name.

<sup>141</sup> Török, *Meroë City*, 276.

bronze oil lamps discussed in this paper. If the iconography Welsby mentions was similar to the Meroitic emblems found on the lamps MFA 24.959, 24.966, and 24.968, it is possible that these lamps were created and designed abroad specifically as gifts to the Meroitic rulers.<sup>142</sup> On the other hand, if the lamps were designed abroad, the emblems could have been incised onto the lamps once they arrived in Meroë. However, this does not explain the raised relief on MFA 24.959.

As discussed above, Meroë had good relations with Rome. If embassies were traveling to the court of Meroitic rulers and bringing gifts, it is possible that trade routes were opened to allow for Roman goods to enter Meroë. There have been a number of Hellenistic objects found in Meroë, but it is difficult to determine if they were trade goods or gifts brought by embassies. Fine objects in bronze and silver were imported to Meroë, but this trade seems limited to the rulers who could afford long distance trade,<sup>143</sup> or who received goods through embassy gifts.

Oil lamps were one of the most common imports to Meroë from the Mediterranean. P.L. Shinnie offers two bronze oil lamps from Queen Amanikhatashan's tomb (Fig 4.1 & 4.2) as examples.<sup>144</sup> The lamps come from the North Cemetery, pyramid Beg. N. 18.<sup>145</sup> Unfortunately, the four MFA lamps discussed here are different in form from the lamps found in Queen Amanikhatashan's tomb. The queen's lamps from Beg. N. 18 have flat tops, and curving handles ending in a horse and centaur. Both the horse and the centaur lamps were buried with the queen in the late first century AD. Shinnie dated these lamps between 100 BC-100 AD due to their appearance, and suggests a Greek craftsman as the artist.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 174-175.

<sup>143</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 174.

<sup>144</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 127.

<sup>145</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 128

Another Hellenistic piece that made its way to Meroë is a finely crafted Greek rhyton that was found in the non-royal West Cemetery of Meroë. Kendall claimed that it was made at the end of the fifth century BC in Athens.<sup>147</sup> Upon further research, I discovered that Kendall was mistaken, and that the rhyton was found in the South Cemetery: Dunham, the excavator, had recorded that the rhyton was discovered in Beg. S. 24.<sup>148</sup> This rhyton was signed by the Athenian potter called Sotades, who was known to be at work in the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BC in Athens.<sup>149</sup> Welsby believes that the royal family and the aristocracy commonly imported aesthetically appealing objects for luxury or ritual purposes.<sup>150</sup> This rhyton may have been brought to Meroë through embassy trade and points to a very long history of Hellenistic trade with Meroë. In addition to material goods, other Roman luxuries were imported to Meroë.

An amphora found in a North Cemetery tomb had been stamped with the name of a Roman wine producing center.<sup>151</sup> The wine center was located in modern day Algeria, so it appears that even foodstuffs were imported from the Roman provinces to Meroë.<sup>152</sup> However, it seems that the trade of utilitarian and low value goods stopped at the Second Cataract (known as the Belly of the Rocks), far to the north of Meroë. The cost of transporting utilitarian objects through the Second to the Fifth cataracts was too high for trade to be viable. This analysis suggests that either the Hellenistic objects found in Meroë were brought as gifts and/or were imported by the royal family or wealthy aristocrats.<sup>153</sup> Thus, the four bronze oil lamps found in Meroë may have been gifts from Roman embassies, or they may have been imported from Rome

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<sup>147</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 45.

<sup>148</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vol. VI, 383.

<sup>149</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 122.

<sup>150</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 174.

<sup>151</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 45.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>153</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 174.

by the elite in Meroë. However, if this was the case, similar lamps would have been found in other Roman provinces.

Are the Meroitic lamps similar in style to Hellenistic oil lamps found outside of Meroë? Kendall claims that while the Meroitic lamps have no parallel outside of Meroë, it is likely that they were imported and later inscribed with the Meroitic emblems (specifically MFA 24.959, MFA 24.966, and MFA 24.968). If they were created locally, he believes they were cast from Roman originals. Kendall, unfortunately, does not give any reasons or evidence to support his theory. It is likely that his analysis is due the lack of evidence for similar lamps in Meroë.<sup>154</sup> Dows Dunham claimed that he was unfamiliar with the style of MFA 24.959, and the only parallels he knew were other Meroitic lamps: MFA 24.966, MFA 24.968, and the Garstang lamp.<sup>155</sup>

The Museum of Fine Arts online catalog does contain two bronze lamps, found in the Tiber River in Rome, that have leaves on their handles. One acts as flame guard (MFA 88.629) (Fig. 4.3) and the other appears to be decorative (MFA 88.630) (Fig. 4.4).<sup>156</sup> However, the shape of the leaves is not similar to the four lamps of this paper. The two leaves of the Tiber River lamps are tear drop in shape, and have balls at the pointed tips of the leaves. A bronze hanging oil lamp from the Roman or early Christian period, also at the MFA, has a rounded body similar to the disputed lamps (Fig. 4.5). However, the suspension is in the form of a chain, not a rod and hook, and the nozzle is much shorter in relation to the Meroitic lamps.<sup>157</sup> A clay lamp found in Meroë's West Cemetery, in tomb Beg. W. 106, is similar. The only image known to me is a sketch drawing by Dunham in *Royal Cemeteries of Kush*, vol. IV, now at the Khartoum

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<sup>154</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 57-58.

<sup>155</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vol. IV 170.

<sup>156</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?recview=true&id=153130](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=153130) and [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?recview=true&id=153129](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=153129)

<sup>157</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?recview=true&id=153127](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?recview=true&id=153127).



Museum (Fig. 4.6). The lamp is described as having an incomplete flame guard, a loop handle and a foot. It measures 21.3 cm high x 20.7 cm long.<sup>158</sup> This incomplete clay lamp may have been used as part of the casting process for bronze oil lamps in Meroë. If this lamp was created in Meroë it certainly points to the local manufacture of the bronze Meroitic lamps.

To prove that some lamps were imported to Meroë, I have included several images of lamps almost identical in style to the centaur and horse lamps found in the tomb of Queen Amanikhatashan at Meroë. The best parallel is in the collection of the Michael C. Carlos Museum. It has a volute nozzle and a curving handle that terminates in a human face, and a short ring base. The lamp was found in Adana, or Antioch, in modern Turkey. It dates to the second or third century AD.<sup>159</sup> The centaur and horse oil lamps from Queen Amanikhatashan's tombs are accepted as imports by scholars, such as Shinnie and Kendall, but offer no evidence for why these lamps are considered imports. These lamps may be classified as imports because they are known to have parallels outside of Meroë. At least six similar lamps were found outside of Meroë, lending support to the theory that Amanikhatashan's two lamps were imports.<sup>160</sup>

Unfortunately, no such correlation can be made for the four bronze oil lamps that are the topic of this paper. On the surface this may seem to support the argument for local origins for the four disputed oil lamps. However, bronze could be melted down and reused throughout the Roman Empire, and if similar lamps did exist outside of Meroë they could have been destroyed in this manner. It may be of note to mention that the MFA online catalog categorizes

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<sup>158</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vol. V, 194, 348.

<sup>159</sup> Carlos Museum Assistant Registrar, Stacey Gannon-Wright

<sup>160</sup> Refer to Szentlőky, *Ancient Lamps*, 142-143; and Museum of Fine Arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?review=true&id=263296](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?review=true&id=263296); and Museum of Fine arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?review=true&id=153125](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?review=true&id=153125).

Amanikhatashan's lamp as Roman, and lamps MFA 24.959, MFA 24.966, and MFA 24.968 as Nubian.<sup>161</sup> This may be due to Dows Dunham classifying the lamps as Meroitic in origin.

The evidence outlined above makes it clear that trade relations between Meroë and the Hellenistic world began early, perhaps as early as Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt. Contacts during the Roman period stayed strong after *Pax Romana* was extended to Meroë. There is plenty of evidence for luxury goods being brought into Meroë, but the lack of parallels to the four Meroitic lamps elsewhere in the Hellenistic world strongly suggests that the lamps were produced in Meroë.

One option for the local creation of the four bronze oil lamps, is that they were created in Meroë by a Greek or Roman artists who had relocated to the area. There is evidence for foreign style in the arts: the tomb of Queen Amanishaketo had a large cache of signet rings, very popular in Meroë, made of precious metals. These signet rings were also fashionable in the Greco-Roman world at the time.<sup>162</sup> There is also architectural evidence of a buildings constructed using Greek measurements, as well as an extant building that resembles a Roman bath. There is also evidence of a school in Meroë that taught the Greek language. It may be possible that the similar styles occurring simultaneously in Meroë and in Greece and Rome were the result of a Greco-Roman or Ptolemaic Greco-Egyptian artist living in Meroë.

During the first century BC, Egypt, Meroë's neighbor to the north, was losing its artistic influence over Meroë and the rest of Nubia. Replacing Egyptian styles in Meroë were Hellenistic forms and motifs. Not only had Greco-Roman styles become more prevalent, they

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<sup>161</sup> Museum of Fine Arts, [http://www.mfa.org/collections/search\\_art.asp?coll\\_accession=&coll\\_name=lamp&coll\\_artist=&coll\\_medium=bronze&coll\\_culture=&coll\\_classification=&coll\\_credit=&coll\\_provenance=&coll\\_keywords=nubia&coll\\_sort=2&coll\\_sort\\_order=0&submit=Search](http://www.mfa.org/collections/search_art.asp?coll_accession=&coll_name=lamp&coll_artist=&coll_medium=bronze&coll_culture=&coll_classification=&coll_credit=&coll_provenance=&coll_keywords=nubia&coll_sort=2&coll_sort_order=0&submit=Search).

<sup>162</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 46. It must be noted that while these rings could have been created in Meroë, they were also very portable and could have been brought to Meroë.

were copied so perfectly that there is a good possibility that a Greek or Roman craftsman may have lived in Meroë.<sup>163</sup> The tomb of Queen Amanishaketo had over 50 signet rings, popular items in the Greco-Roman world at the time.<sup>164</sup> Derek Welsby attributed these rings to foreign artists, not Meroitic artists. However, Welsby asserted that a foreign artist could have been living and working in Meroë at the time of Queen Amanishaketo, whose burial is dated to beginning of the common era.<sup>165</sup> If there were foreign artists present in Amanishaketo's court, then is it possible that Greco-Roman artists were still in Meroë around the dates assigned to the four bronze oil lamps? I believe it may be possible, and have found evidence that may support the theory that foreign artists were living in Meroë.

In the cemeteries of Meroë there are two different types of burials. The native type of burial consists of non-mummified bodies laid out on wooden beds. This type also tended to be rich in grave goods. The other type of burial is the Egyptian style. This consisted of mummified bodies placed in coffins and tended to be poorer in grave goods. This may be evidence that there were two communities living in Meroë; the wealthy Meroitic aristocracy and a colony of Egyptian scribes and craftsmen. These two types of burials date to the early Meroitic period. By the time of the Hellenistic period, the practice of burial beds fell out of use, and most graves were in the Egyptian style with coffins and mummified remains.<sup>166</sup> The Hellenistic period in Meroë may still have housed a colony of foreign craftsmen; their burials would simply not be distinguishable anymore.

The lamps demonstrate an extremely high standard of technique, matching the standard of quality found in Greco-Roman works. This means either that the local Meroitic artists were

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<sup>163</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 186.

<sup>164</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 46.

<sup>165</sup> Edwards, *The Nubian Past*, 144.

<sup>166</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 149-150.

very competent craftsman or that there were indeed local Greco-Roman artists in Meroë.<sup>167</sup> The manufacture of metals requires specialized knowledge of technology. If the demand for luxury metal goods, such as bronze oil lamps, was high enough, perhaps Meroitic royalty imported foreign artists.<sup>168</sup> Edwards believes in the possibility of foreign artists in Meroë. To support his argument he offers glassware found in Meroë with local design elements but with parallels elsewhere in the Roman Empire as evidence of the presence of Greco-Roman artists in Meroë.<sup>169</sup>

Several unusual buildings also point to foreign masons or architects residing in Meroë. Musawwarat es Sufra was a pilgrimage center that was unlike any other temple or sanctuary in Meroë or Egypt. This building is thought to have been built by foreign architects and masons because the usual Egyptian measurements were not used when laying out the temple. Instead, the new Greek metric system was used in this temple. Letters from the Greek alphabet were used to help in the assembly of architectural elements at Musawwarat es Sufra. This seems to imply that Greek or Hellenized Egyptian architects and masons were responsible for the design and construction of this temple complex and used the metric system with which they were familiar.<sup>170</sup> In terms of the use of Greek in the building elements, it should be noted that Greek was the *lingua-franca* of the Hellenistic world, and was likely known to the Meroitic people through diplomatic contacts, trade, and travel.<sup>171</sup> The Greek writer Diodorus asserts that the Meroitic King Ergamenes, contemporary with Ptolemy II, was educated by a Greek scholar.<sup>172</sup>

Another building, known as the Roman Bath, was found inside the walls of the city of Meroë. A nearby well supplied water to a complex system of water channels leading to a tank,

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<sup>167</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 128-129. An additional option would be that Meroitic artists were trained by Greco-Roman artists. However, I found no evidence to support or disprove this theory.

<sup>168</sup> Edwards, *Meroë*, 187-188.

<sup>169</sup> Edwards, *The Nubian Past*, 168.

<sup>170</sup> Burstein, *Hellenistic*, 52.

<sup>171</sup> Personal correspondence with Dr. Peter Lacovara.

<sup>172</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 18.

or pool, lined with bricks. Painted plaster figures, medallions, and lion-headed water spouts decorated the edges of the pools. A trace of painted fresco even remains on a small part of the wall.<sup>173</sup> There was also a semicircular wall that contained niches that may have functioned as seats or as thrones. The bath seems to be a recreational structure and may have imitated a Hellenistic villa<sup>174</sup> or nymphaeum.<sup>175</sup>

Evidence for a school teaching Greek in Meroë may be seen in a column drum with the Greek alphabet written around it. This was found in Meroë and may have been used to teach Meroitic children the Greek language and alphabet. This column drum suggests that Greek scholars were also living in the city of Meroë. If there was a colony of Hellenistic architects, masons, and artists living in Meroë, they would also have needed a school to teach their own children. It is worth mentioning again that Greek was used all over the Hellenistic world, and it is likely that Greek was known to some Meroitic people. If this alphabet was used as a teaching device it could have also been inscribed by a Meroitic scholar fluent in Greek. As of yet, this column drum has remained unpublished, and no further information is available.<sup>176</sup>

There is evidence that Hellenistic travelers, writers, and soldiers made their way to Meroë and settled. I previously mentioned that there was at least one expedition sent south to Meroë during Nero's reign. While neither Seneca nor Pliny mention artists or craftsmen traveling with this group, their accounts indicate that it was possible for people to safely travel to Meroë. Pliny also states that six Hellenistic explorers were able to travel down from Egypt to Meroë. One of these explorers was a writer named Simonides the Younger. While Simonides was writing his

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<sup>173</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 79.

<sup>174</sup> Wenig, *Africa*, 87.

<sup>175</sup> Burstein, *Fringes*, 53.

<sup>176</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 23.

account on Nubia, he lived in Meroë for five years.<sup>177</sup> There may also have been a Greek living in Meroë centuries earlier. Seneca claims that a man called Callisthenes, a soldier in Alexander the Great's Egyptian campaign, moved to Ethiopia.<sup>178</sup> Based on this evidence, it is possible that Hellenistic craftsmen and artisans could have also traveled and lived in Meroë.

The final possibility to consider is that the four lamps were created in Meroë by Meroitic artists. Lindsay Allason-Jones of the Newcastle University Museum believes that the lamps were copies of Roman imports created locally in Meroë. She says that the scale of these lamps differ from the scale of the obvious imports.<sup>179</sup> For this theory to be plausible, Meroitic artists would have needed access to the materials necessary to create bronze, the knowledge of metal smithing and Hellenistic artistic styles, as well as the ability to closely copy those styles.

The technical issue is easily dealt with. Beginning early in the Old Kingdom, copper ores were being smelted at Buhen, though by the end of the Old Kingdom this activity had stopped. However, the smelting site of Buhen does indicate that the knowledge and the technology had been available to smelt copper ores. While the Meroites had knowledge of smelting copper, it is unclear how much ore was available within Meroë's borders.<sup>180</sup> Strabo mentioned that Meroë had copper mines, in addition to gold and iron deposits.<sup>181</sup> A stele found near Aswan states that an official called Hor was sent to retrieve copper from Nubia. In fact, copper can be found in the Eastern Desert from Egypt down into Nubia. There was a heavily used copper mine in Abu Seyal, near the Second Cataract. In Quban, also near the Second Cataract, large amounts of copper slag were found, indicating that ore was being worked there.<sup>182</sup> Shinnie states that

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<sup>177</sup> Pliny, *Geography*, 475.

<sup>178</sup> Kirwan, *Studies*, 72. Ethiopia was the name used by Hellenistic writers to denote the Meroitic Kingdom.

<sup>179</sup> Personal correspondence with Lindsey Allason-Jones.

<sup>180</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 170.

<sup>181</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, 270.

<sup>182</sup> Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw, eds., *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), 150-151.

although copper ore did not naturally occur in the Nile valley the presence of local motifs on bronze bowls found in Meroë indicates that they were made locally.<sup>183</sup> Welsby notes that the Meroitic people certainly created copper alloy artifacts. Welsby added that a crucible, used for copper alloys, was found in an area of Meroë known for iron working. This is important because it is clear that Meroë had access to copper and knowledge of how to work it. The fact that the crucible was in an area associated with iron is also significant since the rods on the bronze oil lamps were made of iron.<sup>184</sup> From the fifth century BC, Meroë was able to work iron and continued to work iron until around 300-500 AD. A large brick building contained furnaces that were used for long periods of time. This, coupled with the massive amount of iron slag found near the furnaces, indicated that there was a specialized metal smithing industry in Meroë.<sup>185</sup> If this is in fact the case, it is entirely possible that creating bronze oil lamps was well within the grasp of Meroitic craftsmen.

The artistic style of Meroë is sometimes hard to distinguish from the cultural styles of the Egyptian and Greco-Roman world, but there are pieces that are clearly Meroitic in design and manufacture. While several metal pieces in the tomb of Queen Amanishaketo were clearly imports from the Greco-Roman world, the large majority of objects were Meroitic in style and design. The quality and value in artistic merit and religious iconography of the Meroitic pieces is extremely high.<sup>186</sup> Another bronze piece made in Meroë is an octagonal shaped bell (Fig. 4.7 & 4.8) found in the tomb of Queen Amanikhatahan, and proves the quality of local craftsmanship. The bell was made of bronze and was commonly worn by oxen, goats, camels, horses, and even dogs. On each face of the bell is an incised image of a bound captive. This

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<sup>183</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 126. One of these bowls has incised *ankh* symbols that are very similar to the emblems found on Meroitic graves, including the four disputed lamps

<sup>184</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 170.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>186</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 186.

example has eight standing and bound prisoners. Each of the prisoners have been stabbed in the back. The prisoners are dressed in various clothing and have different hair styles. They represent nomads or tribes in the areas that directly surrounded Nubia. However, one of the prisoners is fully armed and wears a helmet. This prisoner has been stabbed with a sword, while the other prisoners have been stabbed by arrows.<sup>187</sup> It is possible that this figure represented a Roman soldier since the Roman troops were the only armored forces the Meroitic army faced. Presumably, a Roman craftsman who worked within the Roman Empire would not have created a piece that showed Rome being defeated.<sup>188</sup> In all, Reisner recovered at least 61 bells from 21 tombs in the West and North Cemeteries. This seems to give support to the bells being locally made.<sup>189</sup>

Of the bronze bells recovered from the North Cemetery at Meroë, at least three had incised Meroitic emblems on them. One of the bells was found in Beg. N. 29, the tomb of King Takideamani. This is also where MFA 24.959 was found. The emblems are identical, but the bell's emblem was incised onto the bell. The emblem was only part of the decoration; the main scene on the bell consisted of vultures attacking slain men. The other two bells had similar emblems consisting of an *ankh* inside of a circle resting on top of the sacrificial table. These bells were found in Beg. N. 16, (King Amanitaraqide), and Beg. N. 18, (Queen Amanikhatahan).<sup>190</sup>

Since it is clear that Meroë did have the knowledge of metal smithing, the next issue is whether or not the Meroitic artists were capable of learning and copying foreign techniques and styles. Welsby and Edwards both think that Meroitic artists were not only capable of copying

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<sup>187</sup> A similar bell can also be found in the tomb of King Amanitaraqide, Beg. N. 16. See Kendall, *Kush*, 55.

<sup>188</sup> Kendall, *Kush*, 55.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 53-55.

<sup>190</sup> Dunham, *RCK*, vol. IV, 138-139, 150-151, 169-170.



Greco-Roman style, but they did so actively. Some items are such excellent copies that, as in the case with the four bronze oil lamps, the exact origins of the items are questioned. The Nubians seemed to have been able to reproduce Egyptian, Hellenistic, and Roman motifs perfectly. One example is a bronze bed leg in the form of a squatting goose, a completely Egyptian concept but used on a Kushite bed.<sup>191</sup>

Several examples of sculpture in the round found in the Roman Bath are of Hellenistic style, or show a blend of Meroitic and Hellenistic style. The head of a black African (Fig. 4.9) is crafted in the same style that was popular in Alexandria at the time, and was created around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The figure of the reclining man (Fig 4.10) is crafted in sandstone covered in a thick layer of plaster. The headband, curving forms and straight shoulders, along with the applied plaster are all common elements found in Meroitic art. However, the reclining motif was imported from the Hellenistic world.<sup>192</sup> A third statue, called the Venus of Meroë (Fig. 4.11), seems to be based on images of Aphrodite originating in Greece and widely copied by the Romans. The female figure is nude and her hair is styled in the melon-coiffure popular in contemporary Alexandrian depictions of women. The Venus is standing in a contrapposto pose which is taken directly from the classical world.<sup>193</sup> However, the broad planes of the body and the fingers, joints, and face suggest a Meroitic artist. The sculpture from the Roman Bath at Meroë was originally written off as a corruption of Roman Imperial style; however, scholars such as Steffen Wenig now see it as a testament to the technical dexterity of the Meroitic artists.

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<sup>191</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 185.

<sup>192</sup> Hellenistic examples of men reclining on couches can be found in the Tomb of the Diver, Poseidonia, Italy. See John Griffiths-Pedley, *Greek Art and Architecture*, 246-247.

<sup>193</sup> Wenig, *Africa*, 87.

These objects also prove that local craftsmen could fully understand the most popular styles of Hellenistic art and use these styles in a way that fit into their own local styles as needed.<sup>194</sup>

Another example of Hellenistic artistic motifs being used in Meroë appear on several temple reliefs. In temple reliefs the Meroitic artists usually employed Egyptian figural conventions- composite views of the body with the face and legs in profile with the torso shown frontally. While some gods in Egypt were depicted frontally, the Meroitic artists showed their ingenuity, as well as their knowledge of motifs from the ancient Near East. The ancient Near Eastern influence made its way into Meroë through its contact with the Greco-Roman world. In three reliefs from the Lion Temple at Naqa, gods are shown with their face depicted frontally. The first example is a depiction of the lion god Apedemak. This representation actually gives the god three faces (two in profile and one frontal) (Fig. 4.12). This was an ingenious solution to the problem of the god being approached on either side by the king and queen. This allowed the god to be looking at both rulers. To mask the awkward joint of the two profile faces atop one body, the artist also included a frontal face. The second example is of a god identified by Welsby as Serapis (Fig. 4.13). He is seated with his face and torso depicted frontally. This god is also depicted with a full beard. To my knowledge there is no other depiction of a beard in Meroitic art, and is likely a Hellenistic import.<sup>195</sup> The final god at Naqa is also shown seated, he wears a radiating crown and his face and torso are frontal, but his legs are shown in profile (Fig 4.14). Another example of a god shown with a frontal face can be found at Gebel Qeili (Fig 4.15). The god is shown full face with a radiating crown.<sup>196</sup> This may be a representation of a

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<sup>194</sup> Robert Steven Bianchi, *Daily Life of the Nubians* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 239.

<sup>195</sup> Examples of Hellenistic gods with beards is widespread. See John Griffiths-Pedley, *Greek Art and Architecture*, 165, 173, 198, 208, 235, 236, 237, 244, 262.

<sup>196</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 182.

sun god, possibly the Greek god Helios, depicted in the Hellenistic style.<sup>197</sup> The practice of depicting a figure with a frontal face is not at all Meroitic, but Hellenistic originating in the ancient Near East.<sup>198</sup>

The Meroites clearly developed a taste for Hellenistic styles. This was no doubt fostered by the long history of contact between Meroë and Egypt under the rule of Alexander the Great, the Ptolemaic rulers, and eventually the Romans. The Meroitic people imported goods, used Hellenistic measurements when laying out temple complexes, employed the Greek alphabet in construction projects, may have had a school that taught Greek, and could have even imported foreign artisans. Does this suggest that Meroë accepted and adopted the culture of the Hellenistic world? The Musawwarat es Sufra complex is unique in that it was laid out using the metric system. The vast majority of Meroitic temples were not designed or built using Hellenistic measurements. The Roman Bath has been compared to a Roman villa or nymphaeum by scholars such as Steffen Wenig, and it may have been built by a ruler who had learned about such buildings from embassies from Alexandria. Sculpture found within the Roman Bath had Hellenistic attributes, but the execution gives away its Meroitic roots. The column drum with the Greek alphabet may be regarded as proof that the Greek language was spoken by part of the Meroitic population, although, while some Meroitic members of the elite and royal classes may have been taught the Greek language, it did not replace the local written or spoken languages. There is evidence that the language spoken in Modern Sudan in a small area around the Blue Nile may be a distant derivative of ancient Meroitic.<sup>199</sup> Written Greek certainly did not replace the Meroitic text. This is evidenced in Meroitic monuments that clearly employed the Meroitic

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<sup>197</sup> Hintz, *Meroitic*, 100.

<sup>198</sup> Welsby, *Kush*, 181-182. For examples of Hellenistic reliefs with frontal faces see John Griffiths-Pedley, *Greek Art and Architecture*, 356; for Ancient Near Eastern examples please see Henri Frankfort, *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*, 148.

<sup>199</sup> Shinnie, *Meroë*, 133.

language instead of Greek. If the people of Meroë were truly interested in completely adopting Hellenistic culture, using its spoken and written language would have been one of the best methods to begin assimilation. Embracing the pantheon of Greek and Roman gods would have been another path for Meroë to become more Hellenistic. However, during the Meroitic period local gods such as Apedemak, Arensnuphis, and Sebiumeker came to the forefront of religion in Meroë. Finally, the Meroitic kingdom never adopted a form of currency. It was not until after the fall of Meroë and the onset of Christianity that the area became truly Hellenized. At this time, Greek became the official language of religion and government, and art forms took on the form of Hellenistic Christian art.<sup>200</sup> It seems more likely that due to the distance between Meroë and Alexandria, the center of Hellenistic Egypt, there was no pressure to become Hellenized. The Meroitic citizens were free to choose which elements of the culture they wished to integrate into their own culture. If the Meroitic people did pick and choose Hellenistic elements, it would explain why objects in Meroë vary in their degrees of Hellenism.

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<sup>200</sup> Burstein, *Fringes*, 48, 54.



Figure 4.1: Bronze lamp with the handle ending in the forepart of a horse



Figure 4.2: Bronze lamp with the handle ending in the forepart of a centaur



Figure 4.3: Lamp. Roman. Bronze. Length: 13.4 cm (5 1/4 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.  
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Museum purchase with funds donated  
by contribution (88.629)



Figure 4.4: Lamp. Roman. Bronze. Length: 9.8 cm (3 7/8 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.  
Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Museum purchase with funds donated  
by contribution (88.630)



Figure 4.5: Lamp. Roman or Early Christian, Imperial or Late Antique Period. Bronze. Height x length: 8.8 x 9 cm (3 7/16 x 3 9/16 in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Source unidentified (06.1925)



Figure 4.6: Clay lamp from Beg. W. 106



Figure 4.7: Bronze bell from the tomb of Queen Amanikhatashan

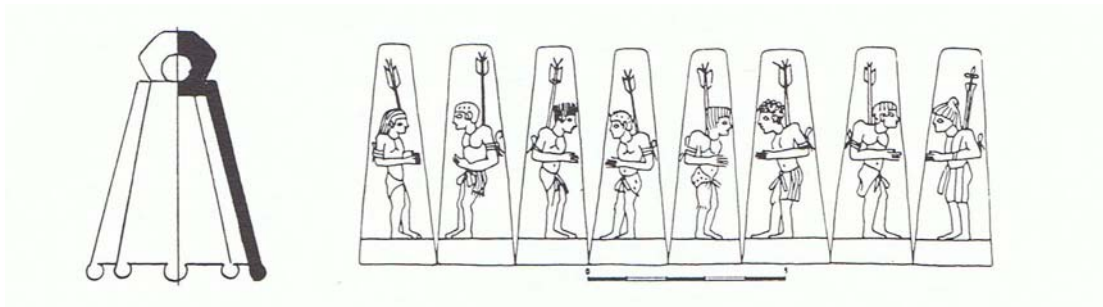


Figure 4.8: Detail of decoration from the bronze bell found in the tomb of Queen Amanikhatashan



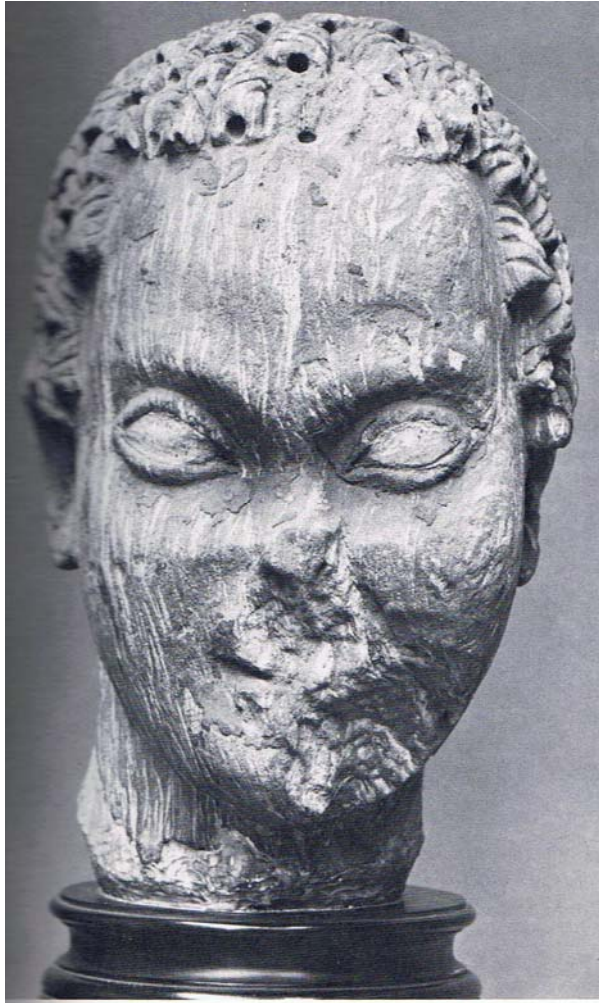


Figure 4.9: Head of a black African, found in the Roman bath at Meroë



Figure 4.10: Figure of the reclining man, found in the Roman bath at Meroë



Figure 4.11: Venus of Meroë, found in the Roman bath at Meroë

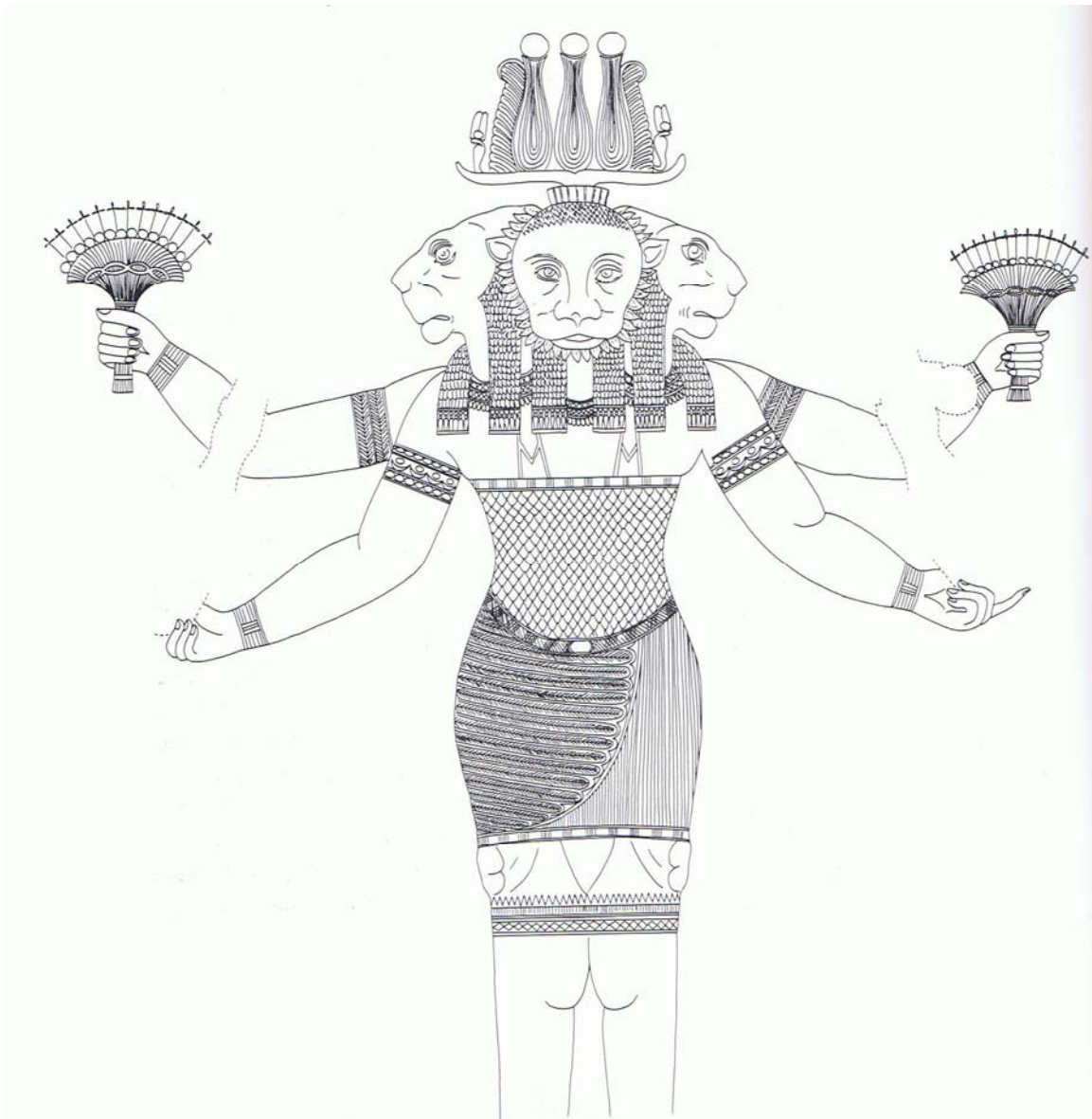


Figure 4.12: Lion Temple relief depiction Apedemak with three faces

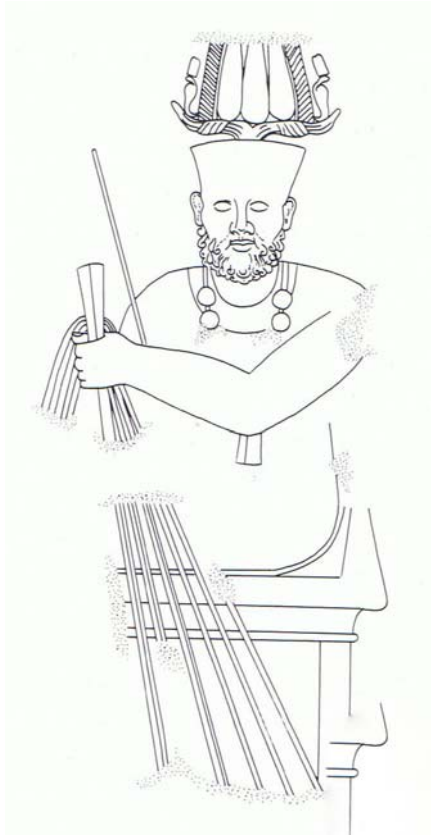


Figure 4.13: Lion Temple relief featuring Serapis with a frontal face

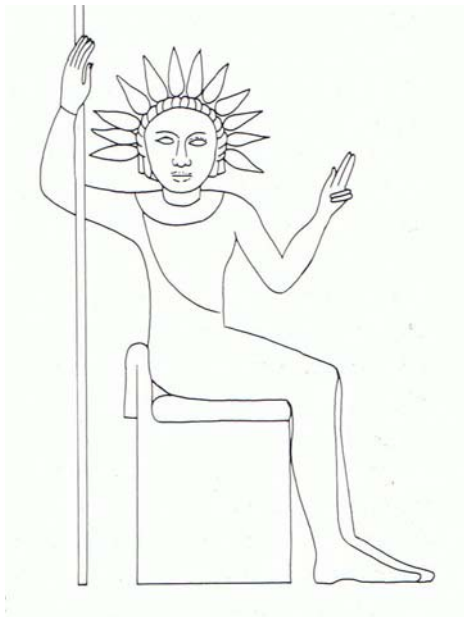


Figure 4.14: Lion Temple relief with an unidentified god with a frontal face

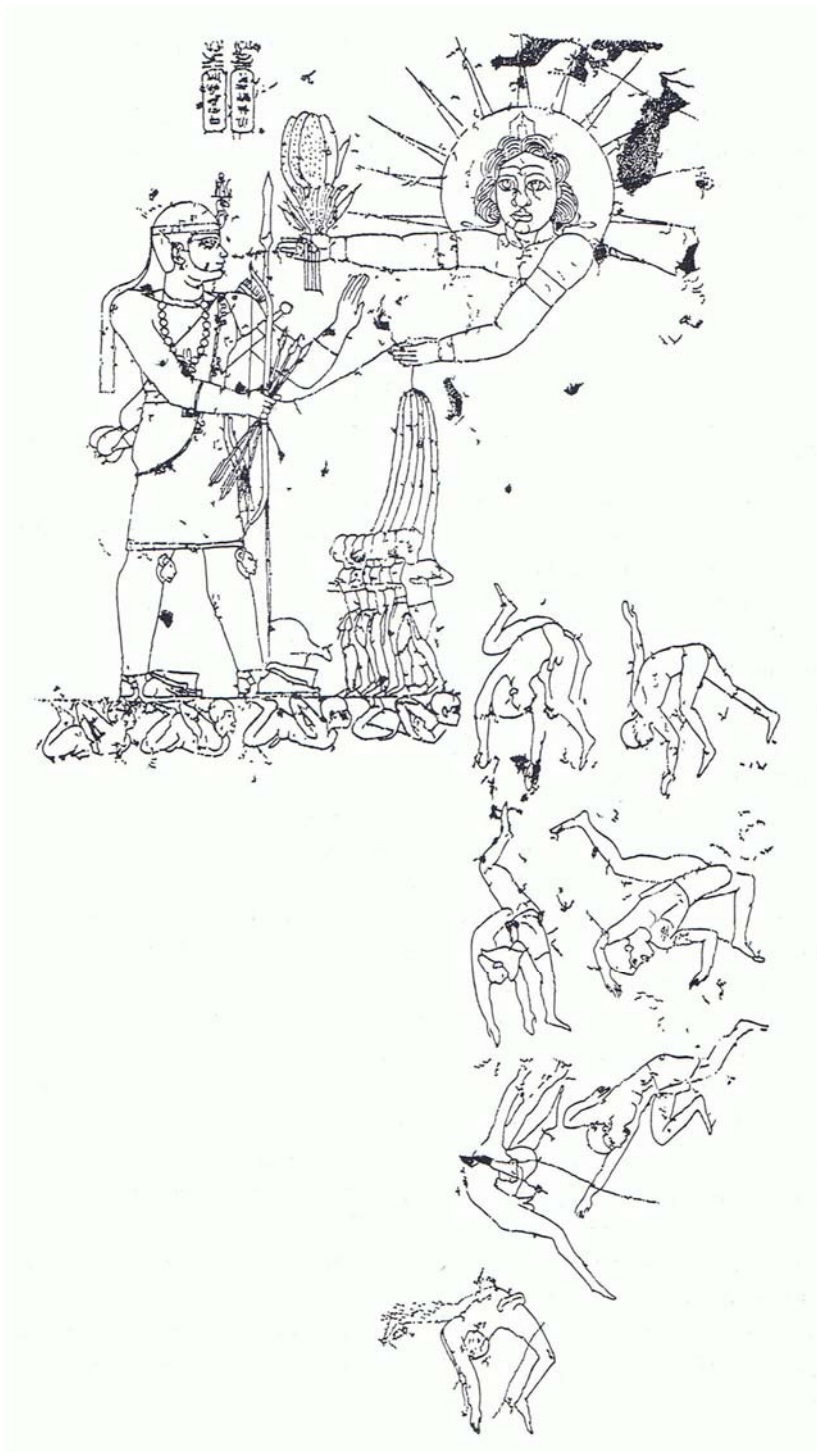


Figure 4.15: Relief at Gebel Qeili showing a god with a frontal face



## 5-CONCLUSION

Previous scholars agree that the four bronze oil lamps were Hellenistic in style and that no parallels were known outside of Meroë, but all are unsure about the exact origins of the lamps. The oil lamps from Queen Amanikhatashan's tombs are considered imports, and have parallels outside of Meroë. These two imports clearly do not resemble the four disputed oil lamps. No close parallels were found for the four Meroitic bronze oil lamps discussed in this paper. I am not sure if four similar looking lamps found in one city are enough to establish a Meroitic style. If the Meroitic craftsmen were able to smelt ore and cast bronze artifacts, such as bells, and if they were able to craft objects similar in style to actual Hellenistic artifacts, such as the head of the black African, they would certainly have been able to create the four disputed oil lamps.

Four unusual bronze oil lamps were excavated in the cemeteries of the city of Meroë. The dates for the burials are rough at best, and there is no way to tell when the lamps were actually cast. The lamps are Hellenistic in style but parallels to them do not exist outside of Meroë. The origins of these lamps have been disputed since their discovery. Perhaps they were created by foreign craftsmen living in Meroë. This would explain their Hellenistic style and incorporation of local emblems. They could be imports from Rome or presented as gifts from Roman embassies. This would account for the Roman style and the fact that the Meroitic emblems were employed to please the local rulers. It is known that only three of the lamps have emblems. However, the import theory seems to be weakened by the lack of parallels found elsewhere in the Roman Empire. Known imported oil lamps found in Queen Amanikhatashan's tomb have parallels outside of Meroë. Even though bronze objects were commonly melted down and reused, a parallel to the disputed lamps surely could be found somewhere. Each of the lamps

may have different origins; some could have been locally made while some could have been imported. If this was the case, perhaps the imports were copied to make local pieces of the same style, which may explain the use of Meroitic emblems on a Roman-style lamp. The only other option is that the four oil lamps were created in Meroë by Meroitic craftsmen. It is known that Meroë had the technology to smelt metals and create copper alloys such as bronze and iron. It is also known that the Meroitic artists were adept at copying foreign styles. If they were able to do both of these things, craftsmen in Meroë could have created the oil lamps. Lindsay Allason-Jones believes that the four lamps were copies of lamps imported from the Italian mainland since the style is very similar to Roman lamps but the scale is different from known Roman lamps. Searching for more oil lamps in Meroë would also be extremely helpful in the discovering the origins of the disputed lamps. I was only able to find the four disputed lamps, the two imported lamps from Queen Amanikhatachan's tomb, and the clay lamp from Beg. W. 106 .

Of course, there is the possibility that the four lamps may have varying origins. Unfortunately, the Garstang Lamp and MFA 24.968 have very little information published about them. I am unsure of what the origins of the Garstang lamp may be and I am uncomfortable making an assumption about its origins without further research, including seeing the object in person. The information published on the lamps MFA 24.959 and MFA 24.96 is more extensive, but by no means conclusive. However, based on my research I feel that it is possible that the lamps were created in Meroë by Meroitic craftsmen. The lack of parallels outside of Meroë, the use of the Meroitic emblems, and the ability of the local craftsmen to work metal and copy foreign styles leads me to believe that the lamps were created in Meroë. Further research, such as an analysis of the metal on these four bronze oil lamps, might confirm that the metal came

from Nubia. Nevertheless, the lamps appear to have been products of Meroë and show the sophistication as well as the cultural contact that contributed to the Meroitic civilization.



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